I'm Gonna Stay Right Here Until They Tear This Barrelhouse Down: Black Power and the Origins of Blues Tourism in Greenville, Mississippi

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“I’M GONNA STAY RIGHT HERE UNTIL THEY TEAR THIS BARRELHOUSE DOWN”:
BLACK POWER AND THE ORIGINS OF BLUES TOURISM
IN GREENVILLE, MISSISSIPPI

A Dissertation
presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Arch Dalrymple III Department of History
The University of Mississippi

By
Tyler DeWayne Moore

May 2018
ABSTRACT

This dissertation connects and comments on the historiography of the black freedom struggle as well as studies of the blues and blues tourism. To blues studies, it recognizes the artists discovered by Worth Long as well as his field research and festival production in the 1970s. It moves away from the social constructions of authenticity and segregation of sound, and it emphasizes black agency. My dissertation also contributes to the historiography of the black freedom struggle by providing a much-needed examination of rural economic and community development in 1970s Mississippi. For studies of blues tourism, it announces a revisionist account of the development of blues tourism in Mississippi, tracing it back to the protests against the Bicentennial Celebration in 1976.

This dissertation takes the long view to better understand the important efforts of organizers at Mississippi Action for Community Education, a black community action group which established the annual Delta Blues Festival in 1978. MACE drew on harvest festival traditions and elements from earlier, black-organized music festivals, which celebrated the image of black progress and racial uplift. By organizing and staging celebrations, African American producers intended to refute racist, stereotypical representations of blacks and replace them with positive images that inspired self-esteem and pride. MACE intended to regain control of the cultural and political identity of African Americans on stage at the festivals. Not merely black alternatives to white-dominated events, not purely recreational nor wholly radical in nature, they provided a forum for reshaping the image of the blues through black experience.
DEDICATION

For my mother and father
I miss you
### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CCAP</td>
<td>Citizen’s Crusade Against Poverty</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDGM</td>
<td>Children’s Development Group of Mississippi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COFO</td>
<td>Council of Federated Organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td>DF</td>
<td>Delta Foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>DM</td>
<td>Delta Ministry</td>
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<tr>
<td>HCUP</td>
<td>Holmes County Union for Progress</td>
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<tr>
<td>MACE</td>
<td>Mississippi Action for Community Action</td>
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<tr>
<td>MCUP</td>
<td>Madison County Union for Progress</td>
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<tr>
<td>MFDP</td>
<td>Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAG</td>
<td>Non-Violent Action Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S-ICIA</td>
<td>Sharkey-Issaquena County Improvement Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNCC</td>
<td>Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>TCUP</td>
<td>Tallahatchie County Union for Progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCVL</td>
<td>Panola County Voters League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCUP</td>
<td>Washington County Union for Progress</td>
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</table>
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT............................................................................................................................ii
DEDICATION..........................................................................................................................iii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS..................................................................................................iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS......................................................................................................v
INTRODUCTION....................................................................................................................1

CHAPTER I
WORTH WESTINGHOUSE LONG, JR:
CIVIL RIGHTS, BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS, AND BLUES......................................................21

CHAPTER II
HARD WORK, RADICAL PATH, SOUTHERN ROAD: EDWARD CHARLES BROWN
AND THE MISSISSIPPI ACTION FOR COMMUNITY EDUCATION....................................75

CHAPTER III
RACE, RELIGION, AND PROMOTION
OF MUSIC FESTIVALS IN THE QUEEN CITY.................................................................120

CHAPTER IV
“NOT RICH, BUT REAL”: SARAH JOHNSON, BLACK POLITICAL POWER, AND THE
(RE)CONSTRUCTION OF THE TOURIST LANDSCAPE IN GREENVILLE.........................232

CHAPTER V
THE RADICAL PSYCHOLOGY OF WORTH LONG IN BLACK FOLKLIFE AND THE
LAND WHERE THE BLUES BEGAN..................................................................................282

CHAPTER VI
CHARLES BANNERMAN, THE DELTA FOUNDATION, & THE LEFLORE COUNTY
FARM COOPERATIVE’S DELTA RICE FESTIVAL.............................................................317

CHAPTER VII
KAREN SHALONG MORGAN, THE DELTA ARTS PROJECT,
& THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF MACE.....................................................................................369
INTRODUCTION

In *Soul on Ice*, Eldridge Cleaver describes the exchange of letters between himself and his lawyer, Beverly Axelrod, a white woman whom he describes as a rebel and a revolutionary, a person of great intelligence and humanity, and a valiant defender of civil rights demonstrators and free speech. Both mentioned their love of music and musicians so often that it gave the letters a soundtrack. Cleaver, for example, suggests that the music of Billie Holiday was perhaps “too sad for a background against which to write letters of love,” but he thought it appropriate in one letter since Axelrod had mentioned that the blues was her “favorite music.” Axelrod had indeed noted several blues artists, such as Lonnie Johnson, to emphasize her good moods. Telling of a visit from one friend who brought over a new record by Paul Butterfield, the white leader of the Chicago-based, racially integrated Paul Butterfield Blues Band, she asserted, “Butterfield wailed the blues.” She also thought Amiri Baraka’s *Blues People* was a “really impressive book,” which should be required reading in schools.¹

In several letters to Cleaver, not only did she mention how much she “liked down home blues,” she admitted her concerns about possessing a different “feeling” than he did about the blues.² He did not “have anything particularly against ‘old, down home blues,’” but he was also not blind to the historical context of its emergence. He asserted that “down home blues” was

² Ibid., 1856.
“good for those who were born down home—they’ve got it in the blood.” Many African Americans who supported the blues did so in a “nationalistic” sense, he argues, expressing much the same impulse that made “the black bourgeoisie dig soul food.” Believing that *Blues People* provided the “definitive analysis of the perspective of black music,” Cleaver recognized how the transformations of black music over the years reflected changes in attitude at a given moment in history. “Now,” he argues, “we do not feel the same as we did when we gave birth to down home blues. That whole bag is dead and gone. Our entire perspective has altered radically, and we have become revolutionary. So we feel revolutionary, and so our music reflects this change.”

The emergence of Third Stream jazz, Cleaver argued, was the simple, natural development of “revolutionary music for a revolutionary people during a revolutionary era.” For this reason, he and Maulana Karenga admit that “to a certain extent, down home blues is reactionary.”

Cleaver’s letters sometimes demonstrated his dejection and sadness, while at the same time reflecting his resilience and hope for the future. Invoking Ray Charles’ performance of “Crying Time” in one letter, Cleaver admits that he has the blues, but he “definitely don’t feel like crying.” He did not intend to give off the impression that he was “sad or dejected.” Rather, he insisted, “I’m just floating around taking inventory of the skull, and wondering, to be frank about it, how you manage to endure so dull a cat, a cat who, in the words of an old Blues song, has ‘been down so long that down doesn’t bother him.’” The very notion, however, of total disinterest was a bit absurd to Cleaver. “It’s not really true after all,” he explained, “one would have to be dead not to be bothered, at all, just a little.” He had certainly been bothered a whole lot, but he simply chose not to dwell too much on the injustices of the past. “I’ve learned that

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3 Ibid., 866.
4 Ibid., 558.
rather than worry about the lost years, days, hours,” Cleaver exclaimed, “it’s better to map a
strategy designed to salvage as much as possible of the scraps from the wreckage.”

In his autobiography Seize the Time, Bobby Seale revealed one particularly clever
salvage operation as the founding of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense in Oakland,
California. The black power disciple of Malcolm X was once an aspiring musician, who
recognized and admired the artistic commitment of jazz artists and “downhome brothers,” such
as T-Bone Walker, Lightnin’ Hopkins and Howlin’ Wolf. Having almost become “engrossed in
being a righteous jazz drummer,” he considered his role in the development of the Party as
similar to the life-altering sense of commitment he noticed in other musicians. “It was like a
musician,” he asserted, “learning how to play a horn and blowing some jazz and really being
with it in such a way that it's your life, it’s part of you. This is the way I always felt about the
Party.” Seale recognized some artists as “righteous” figures and role models, who possessed the
work ethic, ingenuity, and dogged sense of duty that he sought to emulate in the articulation of
his own anger and ideals as a leader of the black freedom struggle. Stanley Booth identified
similar traits in the few musicians he considered “real blues players.” For Booth, mastery of the
blues—seen here as an ethos, an appeal to ethics through musical performance—demanded a
high degree of dedication and character to offer an accurate depiction of a way of life, extending
beyond mere technique, which made “being a blues player something like being a priest.”

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6 In his biography Seize the Time, Seale recalled “sitting in the car one night” with Huey Newton when they got a
hankering to “buy some records by T-Bone Walker, Lightnin’ Hopkins and Howlin’ Wolf, these downhome
brothers”; see Seale, Seize the Time, 205.
7 Bobby Seale, Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton (Baltimore, MD: Black
Eldridge Cleaver and Bobby Seale are not the most often cited advocates of black power to express their thoughts about traditional forms of black music as well as its potential for helping to realize the goal of racial equality in America. Their combined admissions, however, demonstrate a comfortable familiarity with the blues and blues musicians as well as reveal a distinct construction of authenticity through the identification of priest-like “downhome brothers,” who, according to Cleaver, “have [the blues] in their blood” and, according to Seale, served as an example of the qualities required to assert an ethical influence on society. Even though “jazz, not blues, is generally taken to be the soundtrack of the Black Arts Movement,” and scholars continue to emphasize “the wholesale abandonment of blues music in favor of soul music by black youth during the 1960s,” this dissertation salvages as much as possible from the scraps of evidence collected about the promotion of the blues by African Americans in Mississippi during the 1970s. It also demonstrates that the blues was not so easily abandoned by African Americans in the Mississippi Delta. More specifically, it takes the long view to better understand the important efforts of organizers at Mississippi Action for Community Education (MACE), a Greenville-headquartered non-profit community action organization founded by several former SNCC leaders in 1967 to empower black communities and take action. MACE produced the first Delta Blues Festival at Freedom Village.

Over the past thirty-five years historians came to acknowledge the Black Power Movement as an important and legitimate development as opposed to a frustrated,

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counterproductive effort that killed the true spirit of the nonviolent Civil Rights Movement. At the same time, scholars of the blues have illuminated the segregating influence of the record industry, or the romanticized construction of country and blues music along racial lines by recording industry executives, folklorists, writers, and 78-rpm record collectors. While these historiographies overlap on certain important occasions, they have never really been engaged in full conversation. By tracing the ways African Americans used music and musicians contributed to the black freedom struggle in the Mississippi Delta, my dissertation explores the relationship between black power and the initial efforts to promote blues in the 1970s. This dissertation also examines activism during and beyond the Civil Rights Movement, the organizing emphasis on community development, and the influence of MACE on economic development and the participation of African Americans in politics and government. To attain a cogent understanding of the relationship between black power and blues in 1970s Mississippi, these chapter pay attention to the roles of music and musicians, especially from the standpoint of live music at public venues. Who played the music? Who watched them perform? Who organized the events and made the decisions? When and how did local politicians, activists, and community action strategists decide the blues could attract thousands of tourists and establish the foundations of the blues tourism industry? How did the empowerment of African Americans and the success of economic development initiatives influence city-sponsored music festivals and reconfigure the rural tourist landscape? Did the festival really have the struggle in it? Did music have the power to overcome barriers, reinforce them, or allow people to ignore them?

To address these questions, my dissertation connects and comments on the historiography of the black freedom struggle as well as studies of the blues and blues tourism. To blues studies, it recognizes the artists discovered by Worth Long as well as his field research and festival
production in the 1970s. It moves away from the social constructions of authenticity and segregation of sound, and it leans towards R.A. Lawson’s emphasis on black agency.\textsuperscript{11} My dissertation also contributes to the historiography of the black freedom struggle by providing a much-needed examination of rural economic and community development in 1970s Mississippi. For studies of blues tourism, moreover, it announces a revisionist account of the development of blues tourism in Mississippi, tracing it back to the protests against the Bicentennial Celebration in 1976.

In the 1970s, Charles Bannerman and K. Shalong Morgan, of Mississippi Action for Community Education (MACE), established an annual festival tradition in rural Washington County that focused on cultural education and the preservation of the musical traditions of African Americans in the Delta. The Delta Blues Festival drew on the agricultural region’s harvest festival traditions and borrowed elements from earlier, black-organized music festivals, which celebrated the image of black progress and racial uplift. By organizing and staging celebrations, such as the Delta Cotton Maker’s Jubilee (DCMJ) and the Delta Blues Festival, African American producers intended to not only fill a perceived cultural void, but also refute racist, stereotypical representations of blacks and replace them with positive images that inspired self-esteem and pride in the black communities in the Delta. MACE intended to regain control of the cultural and political identity of African Americans on stage at the festivals. Not merely black alternatives to white-dominated events, not purely recreational nor wholly radical in nature, they provided a forum for reshaping the image of the blues through black experience. African Americans made these bids for cultural power and forged their own path forward,

\textsuperscript{11} R. A. Lawson. \textit{Jim Crow’s Counterculture: The Blues and Black Southerners, 1890-1945} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2010).
shaping their own destiny and informing the romanticized understandings of the blues in the process.

In the 1970s, more and more African Americans possessed a well-developed sense of black consciousness, which allowed them to realize that race was a social construction and was negotiated over time—never absolute. Blues music offered a fertile space for the rhetorical construction of a discourse that challenged the hegemonic intrusions and ideologies of the American mainstream.\(^\text{12}\) The pulpit could serve in the same fashion. Similar to the verbal artistry and eloquent delivery of blues singers, pastors and church elders crafted sermons, improvised prayers, crafted essays and other narratives, and sang hymns to educate, uplift, and instill a new spiritual consciousness among African Americans that valorized social action among its members. The blues festival offered MACE, the artists themselves, and several others involved in production, the opportunity—usually reserved for priests and political figures—to educate people about the continuing inequalities in Mississippi and encourage them to support the community action groups that remained on the front lines of the long-abandoned War on Poverty in Mississippi.

The career and work of Worth Long—whether as an activist, community organizer, freedom singer or folklorist—allowed him the rhetorical space over time to fashion his own discourse on the politics of African American culture. By examining his experiences as a leader

\(^{12}\) Since certain forms of music has accompanied several of the largest social protest movements—from the cultural front of the Depression-era, the freedom songs of the early 1960s, and the expressions of third-stream jazz, which proved a salient new form of jazz in the Black Power Movement. The apparent lack of media coverage of protest activities in the 1970s suggested to scholars that activism tapered off in the late 1960s, which left a dearth of scholarship about African Americans in the 1970s. Even though most of the evidence suggests that the drama of a large mainstream social protest movement did not continue long into the new decade, Kesha Morant contends that some black musicians had developed an advanced sense of black consciousness, which allowed them to become the funkiest musicians by challenging the accepted social norms through the skillful manipulation of language and some of baddest music ever put on record; see, Kesha M. Morant, “Language in Action: Funk Music as the Critical Voice of a Post—Civil Rights Movement Counterculture,” *Journal of Black Studies* 42:1 (January 2011): 71-82.
in the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the first chapter traces the history of integrated music festivals in Mississippi during the 1960s as well as the evolution of the black consciousness of Worth Long. Not squarely aimed at the blues, it explores the debates over the usefulness of traditional black music in the civil rights movement and the ways in which the members of SNCC made conscious use of traditional black cultural traditions in Mississippi.

The role of Worth Long in the rise of blues tourism was complex and important. His career as a folklorist, therefore, is the subject of a later chapter, which details his field research in the 1970s, particularly the documentary *The Land Where the Blues Began*—a film often thought of as the sole intellectual product of folklorist Alan Lomax. The collected works of Sterling Brown offered the scholarly foundations for Worth Long’s approach to field research, his projects about black folks in Mississippi, and his interpretive viewpoint in *The Land*. The immense popularity of the documentary led to Alan Lomax shooting a series of films in much the same way but about different musical traditions in other ethnic folk communities. Worth Long was the driving force for making the documentary film about the blues, which proved a success, and it solidified the reputation of Lomax in the minds of PBS, which hired Lomax to produce five more films about other folk music traditions. American Patchwork was the name of the entire series.

The historiography of blues tourism in the South consists of several articles, book chapters, and case studies that in sum construct a mythic narrative of its development from the “grassroots” level to a more centralized, state-sponsored version of blues tourism aimed at providing an economic boon, improving the state’s image, encouraging historic preservation, and promoting racial reconciliation. Though a couple of scholars engaged the emerging landscape of blues tourism in the late twentieth century, the studies in the most recent wave of scholarship rose about in large part as a response to the state’s establishment of the Mississippi Blues
Commission in 2003. These studies often paradoxically lampoon the mythic historical narratives at blues tourist sites while at the same time offering a mythic historical narrative of blues tourism, which silences the important voices of African Americans engaged in promoting black cultural traditions in 1970s Mississippi.

Katherine Duvall Osteen, in her examination of blues tourism in 2011, declared that “the blues image is appropriated” at tourist sites to establish ties to American roots music and then “commodified” without accurately representing its history. In his 2015 thesis, Phillip MacDonald explains that “myth and memory inform constructions of the past” at the historic plantation of Will Dockery, which displays historical narratives that “intentionally leave out the African American lived experience.” Stephen A. King, who, in his 2011 book *I’m Feeling the Blues Right Now: Blues Tourism and the Mississippi Delta*, also recognized that blues tourism brokers “promoted a revisionist history of the state, and the Delta region in particular, to sanitize” its “awful” history of race relations.

Adam Gussow believed his experiences as a street performer proved that the contemporary blues scene was a powerful “force for racial understanding and reconciliation,” but he also made one of his early missions to expose its “submerged history of racial violence.” He found the lyrical embodiment of his dissertation, “‘Seems Like Murder Here,’ Southern Violence

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13 Luther Brown, “The Mississippi Delta Blues Trail: An Implementation Proposal to The National Endowment for the Humanities, Delta Center for Culture and Learning (Cleveland, MS: Delta State University, 2006), 36.  
and Blues Texts, 1890-1996,” in a song by Charley Patton, whose response to the increase of spectacle lynching, he argues, was indicative of the rise of the blues in the turn-of-the-century South.  

His 2000 dissertation evolved into an article in *Southern Cultures* and his 2002 book *Seems Like Murder Here: Southern Violence and the Blues Tradition*, and he applied his paradox of the blues to Mississippi blues tourism in his 2006 article “Where is the Love?” In Mississippi, before the state might heal its old wounds and move forward, “letting the past reside inside us but in a new, non-corrosive way,” Gussow argued that people simply needed to “throw off” their “reflexive cynicism and unconscious despair” about race relations. The maintenance of myths associated with southern history, as well as the religious beliefs that buttress them, however, cannot be so easily discarded as a broken harmonica and some loose change at the grave of Sonny Boy Williamson II.

Despite blues tourism scholars’ emphasis on the significant role of historical accuracy in achieving the goals of blues tourism in Mississippi, they put forward historical narratives of the development of blues tourism in the last quarter of the twentieth century that seem to “intentionally leave out the African American lived experience.” Several scholars, for example, have asserted that the emergence and survival of blues tourism occurred on the “grassroots level.” In “the first systematic effort to write the history of Mississippi’s blues

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21 In his 2010 study of the black freedom struggle in Indianola, which claims to explain how the city used blues tourism to develop a new identity in the late 1980s, Forrest Ansel Prichard asserts that local blues heritage was “recognized…particularly from a grassroots level.” Phillip MacDonald emphasizes that blues tourism grew “from humble grassroots beginnings,” and he places the onus on the state for guiding its expansion into a multimillion-dollar industry; see Phillip MacDonald, “Birthplace of the Blues?: Dockery Farms, Mythic South, and the Erasure of the African American lived Experience in Mississippi Blues Tourism,” master’s thesis, the University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill, 2015, 4; and Forrest Ansel Prichard, “Fighting the Blues with Blues: How Indianola,
tourism industry,” Stephen A. King asserts that it was “mostly a grassroots affair” during the early years (late 1970s). He describes the grassroots promoters as a “group of white blues enthusiasts who immigrated to the Delta with the hope of promoting the state’s rich blues heritage.” King maintains that the “grassroots” supporters in the early days of blues tourism were all non-native, white blues enthusiasts.

Each of the subsequent chapters, therefore, includes a biographical sketch of one African American who played a significant role in the development of blues tourism in Mississippi. Though he recently included a correction of sorts in an edited volume, King only added the names of two African American “grassroots” supporters of blues tourism, folklorist Worth Long and festival promoter Malcolm Walls. The most glaring omission from the “informal network of African American and white entrepreneurs and volunteers” was Jimmy “Duck” Holmes, an African American festival promoter in Bentonia who began organizing the Bentonia Blues Festival in the 1970s as an alternative to Yazoo City’s Old Fashioned Fourth of July Celebration. My dissertation adds a few more names to the list by examining the emergence of...

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23 The biographies of African Americans includes Worth Long, Ed Brown, Sarah Johnson, Charles Bannerman, and Karen Elaine League. Chapter 3 also includes biographical sketches of Jerry and Donnie Brown as well as Mike Ward, who later worked as the only white staff member of MACE and helped stage the Delta Blues Festival.
24 He lists such figures as Sidney Foster Graves, who founded the Delta Blues Museum in 1979; Jim O’Neal, co-founder of *Living Blues* magazine who, in 1988, along with Patty Johnson, opened Stackhouse Mississippi Arts and Gifts / Delta Record Mart, a combination recording studio, record store, and headquarters of Rooster Blues Records; John Ruskey, who served as curator of the Delta Blues Museum after Graves; Skip Henderson, who came to the Delta in the late 1980s and founded the Mt. Zion Memorial Fund; Andy McWilliams, a Clarksdale disc jockey who co-founded the Sunflower River Blues Festival in 1988; and Howard Stovall, stock broker and heir to Stovall Plantation, who brought Billy Gibbons to Clarksdale in the late 1980s.
Mississippi blues tourism in the context of the black freedom struggle in the 1970s, specifically Washington County and its county seat of Greenville, which Living Blues co-founder Jim O’Neal referred to in the fall of 1979 as, “the hot spot for blues bands in the Delta, and perhaps in the entire South.”

Rather than provide a most welcome historical narrative of the years between the civil rights movement and the rise of blues tourism, some studies offer highly problematic “blues counter memor[ies]” that reinforce antiquated understandings of the black freedom struggle in Mississippi. Similar to David Blight’s explanation of the way northerners and southerners reconciled after the Civil War by forgetting about slavery and emancipation, whites made “peace with the sixties” by designating a good and bad Civil Rights Movement—one successful and over, but the other subversive, violent, and better off left in the past. This view aligns with Charles Payne, who, in I’ve Got the Light of Freedom, argued that the younger generation lost patience with the older generation's “organizing tradition” at the same time the movement lost its self-discipline and resourcefulness. Crystal R. Sanders, however, in her recent monograph A Chance for Change: Head Start and Mississippi’s Black Freedom Struggle, complicates the periodization thesis of Payne. Her book describes the rise and fall of the Child Development Group of Mississippi (CDGM), a grassroots organization inspired by activists from the Student

Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, that became one of the largest Head Start providers in the country between 1965 and 1968. Committed to employing poor community members and including them in the organization’s leadership, the CDGM focused its attention on recruiting parents and other members of the black community to work as teachers, cafeteria employees and maintenance workers. The result was a new sense of security and confidence for people, which encouraged them to take leadership roles. Sanders emphasizes the political impact of the CDGM, which spawned a generation of activists that continued to fight for civil rights.

The story of MACE contributes to this more capacious, yet complicated, depiction of the black freedom struggle. Funded and designed through intimate cooperation with powerful whites, the community action organization arguably came to represent the embodiment of black power while also becoming more assimilated into the American mainstream. African Americans managed and directed the efforts of MACE, which, through its ethos and work, hoped to bring about the economic and psychological uplift of black communities. Implanting an affirmative sense of racial pride and identity, MACE hoped to preserve the cultural traditions of black folks in the Delta, establish a forum for the cultivation and expression of the black arts, and facilitate the construction of new communal institutions more responsive to the needs of the people.

This dissertation also complicates our understanding of the relationship between capitalism and the black freedom struggle in its Chapter 6 examination of the Delta Foundation, which examines the career of its charismatic director, Charles Bannerman, and the rural rice

festivals on the black-owned farm cooperative of Ed Scott. While activists and scholars have certainly critiqued capitalism and addressed issues of economic justice, particularly through community-based activism to eradicate poverty and articulate welfare rights, not too many have emphasized the significance of labor and business creation. Yet, according to one advocate of black power, “all power—political, social, and civil—derived from economic power.”^32 MACE and the Delta Foundation “represented the potential embodiment of the business of Black [P]ower because they combined the promises of locally responsive decision making with seemingly vibrant models of economic development.”^33

The most common theme in the history of community development corporations is the failure of various groups to achieve long-term financial success for themselves or their communities. Considering that the history of American business is often one of failure, the history of community development resonates with the experiences of most businesses without high-minded social mandates. Every small victory was costly and outweighed the expected benefits, as activists and affiliates find themselves unable to overcome the problems of unemployment and poverty. By focusing on MACE and the Delta Foundation, this dissertation reveals how idealistic individuals and groups hoped to turn the incomplete victories of the civil rights movement into more tangible benefits for people on the lowest rungs of the social and economic ladder. Though dogged by failure to achieve their goals, these chapters introduce

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^33 Community development corporations (CDCs) are usually community-based, nonprofit organizations that direct private capital and federal funds to develop infrastructure, improve housing, do community planning, and provide social and cultural services within specific communities. CDCs also owned, operated, and managed businesses; see, Jill and Rabig, eds., *The Business of Black Power*, 53.

activists who fully believed they could wrestle away from large corporations, private foundations, and national organizations the tools required to combat poverty, empower communities, build wealth, and secure a share of the “American Dream.”

The first three chapters demonstrate the concern over the desegregation of public gatherings, such as concerts and festivals, dictated the location and musical genres of the artists. Fearing the outbreak of race riots, the managers of the large venues quit booking most black artists in the early 1960s. Mike Ward and the Candy Shoestring became the targets of economic intimidation and threats of physical violence while attempting to stage the 1970 Delta Rock Festival. Since no venues in Greenville would rent to them, Ward rented the forty-acre farm of James Mixon, a black landowner who ran a store and enjoyed an autonomous existence outside of Greenville. Much like in the early 1960s, African American landowners were less susceptible to economic reprisals from powerful whites. The subsequent passage of the anti-festival law stigmatized rock festivals for their potential to attract interracial crowds, and the only type of music considered “family friendly” in Mississippi was country music, which constituted the musical focus of most festivals during the 1970s.

The lack of black participation in Greenville’s Bicentennial Celebration inspired a cultural renaissance among African Americans, many of whom realized that the dearth of programs and exhibitions dedicated to black culture and heritage had resulted in a lack of pride and self-esteem in the black community. The Delta Ministry initiated projects to document the

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history of the civil right movement in Greenville. The political victories of black officials and the organizing activities in other Delta counties fueled the cultural and public relations office of Mississippi Action for Community Education (MACE), which organized a series of celebrations that merged black political victories and social projects with the rich gospel and blues traditions.

African American activists started taking control of their own liberation in the 1970s. Once people realized that traditional political processes and interracial cooperation were viable methods of achieving social change, MACE offered the tools and training for people who remained committed to these principles to continue their involvement in the freedom struggle. A regional organization that drew backing from private foundations and liberal white elites, MACE sought to empower black communities by training local people about how to effectively navigate politics and local government to pursue their own ends. MACE hoped to energize what remained of the organizing tradition, build well-organized and independent local affiliates, and inspire a new generation of grassroots leadership in much the same way as SNCC. Their work with rural black southerners secured important benefits for residents whose needs had long been neglected by white officials, and the competence displayed by MACE-trained office holders helped whites overcome the lingering anxiety over black political participation. MACE provides a case study of how some activists carried on the fight to achieve racial equality and creatively adapted to the context of the black freedom struggle without compromising their goals of black self-determination and social justice.

The first chapter examines the activism of Worth Long and the debate about traditional black music during the early 1960s, and the second chapter follows the activism of Edward Charles Brown and details the founding and initial growth of the Mississippi Action for Community Education (MACE) in the late 1960s.
The third chapter almost exclusively concerns white-organized music festivals in Greenville, including the events held on the concrete wharf during the 1930s and 1940s, the Water Carnival, the 1970 Delta Rock Festival, and the Mainstream Festival. The Delta Cotton Maker’s Jubilee, a black-organized event touting black progress and respectability, is the only black-organized event included in this chapter. It also provides the historical context for the staging of the Delta Rock Festival outside Greenville in 1970, specifically tracing the early lives and careers of two brothers, Jerry and Donnie Brown. It traces the experiences of their band, The Candy Shoestring, as well as their efforts to stage a rock festival in Greenville, the backlash to their efforts by conservative evangelicals, the staging of the festival on the black-owned land of James Mixon, and the anti-festival law that limited festivals to 18 hours.

The last sections of the third chapter look at the participation and performance of African Americans in the Greenville Chamber of Commerce-sponsored Mainstream Festival from 1970-75 and 1976-1980. It began as a trade promotion for downtown merchants, which reflected the counter protest buy-ins of white business owners in the late 1960s.\(^{36}\) The majority of the musical entertainment was country or “family friendly” groups during the first half of the 1970s, but the amount of minorities who performed at the celebration increased each of the first five years. In 1976, however, the organizers booked almost all country artists and excluded African Americans from the Bicentennial Celebration. In protest of the musical lineup at the Bicentennial, local militants announced a separate, black cultural festival in Strange Park. Though the protest festival never materialized, a few black militants had forced the chamber to book a more diverse

lineup of musical talent as well as provided the spark for cultural education to become an integral part of community development in the Delta.

The following year, the chamber acquired a new festival director and started booking more balanced musical lineups at the concerts on the levee during the Mainstream Festival. The diverse genres of music at the festival attracted an increasingly integrated audience to the wharf in downtown Greenville, and despite winning an award, it lost its municipal underwriting in 1980 and never returned. The rising number of black faces in downtown Greenville during the 1980 Mainstream Festival stoked the fears of racial integration and proved too much for a powerful local group of conservative evangelicals, who cut its funding after 1980. The decision allowed the Delta Blues Festival to become a premier regional festival event in the Delta, attracting over 35,000 people at its height of popularity in the mid-1980s to hear the blues and watch the performances in Freedom Village.

The fourth chapter examines the participation of African Americans in local politics and municipal government and its influence on the development of blues tourism in Washington County. By exploring the life and initial election of the first African American city councilperson, Sarah Johnson, this chapter demonstrates how she secured an unlikely victory after a series of highly publicized political campaigns in the early 1970s, during which she was one of the first people in Mississippi to suggest promoting the blues traditions of the Delta. While stopping the city council’s initiative to use revenue sharing funds and build a downtown civic center, she forwarded the idea of staging a blues festival on the levee, utilizing the same resources that made the Mainstream Festival such a success. In 1973, however, the various elements of a successful event had simply not yet come together into full maturation. The Washington County Expo Building was the setting for blues and rock concerts in Greenville
throughout 1976, but the construction site required by in-progress renovations to the building made it unsuitable for concerts after 1976 and allowed for the reconfiguration of tourist landscape from the city to the county and from the county to privately-owned farms.

The fifth chapter details the transformational career of Worth Long as a folklorist in Mississippi as a new type of psychological activism that employed the same strategies of African Americans during celebrations in the Jim Crow-era. It covers the education of Worth Long on SNCC’s Cultural Committee, his field research for the Festival of American Folklife, his role as a consultant for the Smithsonian’s African Diaspora project, his collaborations with Roland Freeman for the Mississippi Folklife project, and the conceptualization and shooting of the film *The Land Where the Blues Began*, a documentary often attributed solely to its narrator Alan Lomax. From the late 1960s to the late 1970s, Worth Long conducted a serious amount of field research into black cultural traditions in the South. He also discovered several talented blues artists who played an important role in the growth of blues tourism in Mississippi. Long made sure that he emphasized a discourse of resistance in the blues, which, he believed, grew directly from the work experiences of African Americans.

The sixth chapter centers on changing work experiences of African Americans after 1966 in the Delta as well as the job opportunities created through the Delta Foundation, a non-profit organization founded by several competing community development groups in the region, including MACE and the Delta Ministry. It also details the life and career of Charles Bannerman, the founding president of the DF and the second director of MACE, who took over for Ed Brown in 1972. The Delta Foundation and the Leflore County Farm Cooperative, led by Ed Scott, staged several rice festivals in the late 1970s, which invoked the long-standing traditions of harvest festivals in the Delta as well as other agricultural regions of the Atlantic
World. The rice festivals were the rural embodiment of black economic power in the 1970s. Despite the eventual failures of the DF and the farm cooperatives, some folks exhibited a rural black consciousness based on land ownership that emerged from Jim Crow articulate, disciplined, autonomous, and prepared to serve a crucial role as safe havens for activists in the 1960s and integrated festival spaces in the 1970s.

The seventh chapter details the establishment of MACE’s public relations department in 1977, specifically its cultural arm, The Delta Arts Project. It also highlights the winding route to Greenville taken by the initial director of the arts project, Karen Elaine League, who was known as K. Shalong Morgan during her time at MACE. She conducted the original survey of local needs that gave rise to the Delta Arts Project, and she composed the initial drafts of the grant proposals for the initial Delta Blues Festival, the details of which fill the last chapter.
In the early morning hours of March 20, 1977, people started gathering at Williams Chapel in Ruleville, Mississippi to mourn the loss of Fannie Lou Hamer, one of the most courageous and dedicated Mississippians involved in the black freedom struggle.\(^{37}\) The state highway patrol came out and helped guide the large amount of vehicles to the main parking area. Only members of her immediate family, her close friends, and several well-known politicians and activists such as Stokely Carmichael, who was showing his old fire, managed to squeeze inside the small, 300-seat, white chapel. Several hundred more local people—perhaps her true friends, in one attendee’s opinion—who came to pay their last respects had to content themselves with listening to the service on loudspeakers set up outside to accommodate the overflow crowd.\(^{38}\) Whether they only knew her by name, “knew of and were benefitted by her works,” or “knew her well because they had worked with her, prayed with her, and struggled with her in her longtime fight for freedom and justice,” African American leaders and admirers from every region of the country gathered out of respect for a “shining light for truth, human rights and

\(^{38}\) Hundreds of people, who could not get into the small chapel, had to attend a separate memorial service at Ruleville Central High School, which incited some activists to argue that the real friends of Hamer were ignored; Kay Mills, This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 310.
dignity for all.” All except the folks outside the chapel, the “little folks” for whom Hamer had fought so courageously during her life, got to experience the passion and energy that unfolded in front of the fearless woman’s open casket. The continuing struggle to give voice and representation to marginalized blacks in the Delta demonstrated that some people had simply failed to understand the message. For some former members of SNCC, the ceremony was an embarrassment, an attractive opportunity for politicians and religious leaders to gain some media exposure, even if their contemporaries were necessarily pushed to the background. The funeral service, they concluded, was an almost “perfect contradiction of the values [Hamer] tried to live by.”

Hamer’s family had called on Delta Ministry (DM) director Owen Brooks to organize the program for the funeral service, which featured a diverse group of speakers, including United Nations ambassador Andrew Young, who paid her bail and ended a debilitating stint in the city jail of Winona. The injuries she suffered at the hands of two black prisoners who, at the behest of the police, struck her repeatedly with blackjacks, never truly healed, providing a painful reminder of her extreme mistreatment. After a few inspiring songs from the famous Tougaloo College Choir, Young told a story about the election of 1976. The national election analysts indicated that the race was so close that the state of Mississippi might be the deciding factor, “but when they said Mississippi went our way,” he recalled, “I knew then that the hands that had been

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pickin’ the cotton had finally picked the president.” Hamer was among a chorus of voices, Young declared, who:

shook the foundations of this nation, and everything I learned about preaching, politics, life and death, I learned in your midst. The many people who are now elected officials would not be where they are had we not stood up then. And there was not a one of those who was not influenced and inspired by the spirit of this one woman.\textsuperscript{42}

Though the election of Carter was considered a step forward, particularly for Young, who received a diplomatic appointment from the president, the complete lack of black-elected officials in Sunflower County was reflective of a more serious problem. By “not carrying on the organizing traditions” of the 1960s, African Americans were undermining “everything she lived and worked” so hard to achieve during her life.

Young also led the crowd in singing one of Hamer’s favorites: “This Little Light of Mine.” As people inside and outside “joined in and began to sing, clap and pat their feet to the beat of the music,” one witness noticed that a “spirit of unity enhanced the crowd,” evoking a feeling of inclusivity so characteristic of freedom songs by the 1960s. It was a day, according to biographer Kay Mills, “on which the movement reassembled and could have rekindled its fires.”\textsuperscript{43} The activists who worked with Hamer in the 1960s, however, had been pulled in different directions and gone their separate ways in the 1970s. A handful of them entered politics, some went into teaching and social work, and others developed into militant separatists. Yet, for each one of them, Hamer’s activism served as a keystone, a unifying force representative of the grass roots organizations that continued to struggle in the Delta. The inclusion of other,

\textsuperscript{42} Kay Mills, “From \textit{This Little Light of Mine},” in \textit{A Place Called Mississippi}, ed. Marion Barnwell (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 227.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
more radical speakers, such as Stokely Carmichael, ensured a display of energetic and inspirational oratory, which stood in stark contrast to the solemn attendance of H. Rap Brown, fresh out of prison, where he converted to Islam.\textsuperscript{44} Carmichael recognized the important legacy of Fannie Lou Hamer, who possessed the courage—when others were either afraid or unconcerned—to stand up to white supremacist violence and fight for the human and political rights of African Americans. “She is us,” he argued, “She represents the very best of us. She understood her purpose on earth.”\textsuperscript{45}

The premature death of Hamer not only brought black leaders together for the funeral, it provided an opportunity to recognize the negative impact of forced racial integration in the public schools. Some of the young black students who attended the public schools in Greenville in the early 1970s faced a new, seemingly ever-present feeling of pressure, which stemmed from the confluence of hoping to impress their new, white teachers and not wanting to disappoint the black community at large. Had they known of the horrors and atrocities of Jim Crow, or experienced the hope, the liberation ethos, or limitless possibilities of the Civil Rights Movement, however, black youths may have avoided sabotage or perhaps chosen a different path that black culture and the black freedom struggle. Ella Baker, in her speech at the funeral, expressed much concern over the lack of scholarship on the struggle as well as the lack of historical knowledge among young blacks. The movement had become dormant, she argued, and something needed to be done to give young people an understanding of the push for civil rights.\textsuperscript{46} Even though it was supposed to have been a celebration of the life and activism of a

\textsuperscript{45} “Perpetual Memorial Planned for Hamer,” \textit{LLC}, March 21, 1977, p.3.
great woman, Hamer’s funeral also proffered a sense of urgency regarding the lack of education on black culture and history among a diverse and somewhat estranged group of activists.

It was at the funeral of Hamer, in addition, MACE’s charismatic leader Charles Bannerman approached longtime activist and folklorist Worth Long, who served as an honorary pallbearer at the funeral. In a conversation, Bannerman expressed his lack of satisfaction in recent efforts at organizing a rice cutting festival to promote the success of the Leflore County Farm Cooperative, an all-black organization of landowning farmers. The cooperative had offered hope to other farmers with its high “standard of accomplishment,” but despite the support of the Southern Cooperative Development Fund (SCDF) and the Delta Development & Management Corporation (DDMC), the event only attracted perhaps one hundred people to the rice cutting demonstration and feast of “bar-b-qued ribs, chicken and other delicious food” in the fall of 1976. Bannerman did not want for confidence in his abilities to identify and recruit talented individuals, and he realized that the nascent rise of the unlettered folklorist meant he had access to the types of information and resources necessary to transform the festival into the embodiment of black excellence and financial success in the Delta.47 Perhaps with the words of Ella Baker echoing in his head, Long insisted that the festival serve as a positive educational force in the black freedom struggle. “He had tried a rice festival,” Long informed, “but it didn’t work. I told him if he did it in Mrs. Hamer’s honor, with the struggle in it, I would help him” conceptualize and produce, what came to be known as, the Delta Blues Festival in 1978.48 By securing the assistance of such a pleasant, well-respected community organizer and recently-experienced folklorist as Worth Long, Bannerman attached MACE and the Delta Blues Festival

to a sense of duty, humility, and militancy, which opened up a new world of cultural possibilities for MACE and its county affiliates.

Worth Long was indeed much more than an untrained folklorist. He was also a dedicated civil rights activist and one of the most radical members of SNCC during the mid-1960s, who played an important role in not only the 1966 election of Stokely Carmichael but also in SNCC’s turn towards black power. Before his involvement with the struggle, Long had located and made field recordings of black folk musicians. For his marriage in 1959, he received an eight hundred dollar Ampex reel-to-reel tape recorder instead of a wedding band. It was “heavy as hell,” he recalled, but a “good recorder.” His honed his skills as a folklorist while working as a field coordinator for SNCC, which brought him into contact with a host of black folk artists, many of whom reflected the remnants of cultural traditions that stretched all the way back across the Atlantic Ocean and perhaps even the Pacific. In almost every southern town, he discovered at least one musician who exhibited a “second hand of tradition from the original players.” In fact, partly due to his belief that urban “musicians who recorded were very much weaker in their musical talents than some of the musicians who would not leave home,” he engaged in a promising career as a folklorist in the 1970s, which demonstrated his matured expressions of a confident black consciousness and made him a role model for activists of all stripes.50

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50 Worth Long, interview by Tom Dent, July 29, 1979, Tom Dent Papers.
THE EMERGENT ACTIVIST

Born on January 15, 1936 in Durham, North Carolina, Worth Westinghouse Long, Jr. received an early religious and political education from his father, a World War I veteran and presiding elder in the AME Church.\(^{51}\) Worth Long, Sr. was also a proud proponent of black self-determination, who admired Booker T. Washington and espoused the importance of black land ownership. Long Sr., in addition, was a staunch Pan-Africanist, who rarely missed an opportunity to instruct his young son on the impetus of self-sufficiency and Pan-African unity.\(^ {52}\)

“My father was a race man,” he recalled, “He believed in Africa, self-reliance [and] self-sufficiency. That was his concept of doing for yourself, and he felt that everybody in his congregation should acquire land, at least twenty acres, and should try to be independent, work for themselves, but then cooperate among themselves.”\(^ {53}\) Years before becoming a staffer for the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), he developed his own brand of militancy based on Pan-Africanism that stemmed from his father’s constant instruction.

At all-black Hillside High School, he ran track and played football until graduation in 1953, when he entered the service and spent the next two years working as a medic on a remote island near Japan. He used his limited medical skills as best he could, but he also developed a growing awareness and understanding of folklore while watching local festivals. “The children's kite festivals and stories…that had to do with what I call traditional ways,” Long asserted, “were the most interesting,” leaving a distinct impression on the young folklore enthusiast. At the end

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of his tour, he returned to the United States and enrolled at Philander Smith College in Little Rock, Arkansas, an historically black, private, four-year liberal arts college and founding member of the United Negro College Fund (UNCF). Long witnessed one of the violent early concussions of the 1954 *Brown v. Board* decision on September 23, 1957, when nine black high school students, known as the Little Rock Nine, found an angry mob of over one thousand white segregationists waiting on them in front of Central High School. President Dwight D. Eisenhower eventually had to send in the 327th Airborne to escort the nine students to school.

Worth Long returned to his hometown of Durham in 1958 to attend Duke University and work at Bell Laboratories. It was not until the summer of 1959, however, that he first participated in sit-ins and stood in picket lines. While working at the laboratory, he learned the skills and organizing tactics so necessary to lead other members of SNCC, which, coupled with his Pan-Africanist worldview, made him a formidable force in the struggle for civil rights in the 1960s.

At SNCC conferences in North Carolina, Worth Long learned how to form an effective picket line and how to organize nonviolent direct-action campaigns. Some folks credited him with “good public relations sense” as well as prodigious organizing abilities, which proved crucial to the success of sit-ins. While honing his skills, Long remained connected to students at Philander Smith College, and he returned to “The Land of Opportunity” to finish his undergraduate degree as well as serve as the director of public relations for what became an official branch of SNCC in the fall of 1960.55 He intended to initiate marches, sit-ins and pickets


to desegregate the downtown business district. After recruiting several dozen students from Philander Smith College, Long led a march of thirty students around the courthouse from four until twelve midnight on Election Day in November. “It came off peacefully and without incident,” according to the Student Voice, the official organ of SNCC. Subsequent demonstrations, however, became more confrontational. When student activists conducted concomitant sit-ins at lunch counters in Woolworths, Walgreens, and Blass Department Store, the police arrested seven demonstrators, all of whom were subsequently found guilty of breaching the peace, fined five hundred dollars, and given sentences of six months in jail. An unshaken Worth Long continued to organize sit-ins into the winter months of 1960, but lunch counter managers had started to simply close up shop in response to protests, foreshadowing a lull in activity the following year. While SNCC worker Bill Hansen believed the “exact reasons for the movement discontinuing” in late 1960 were “somewhat lost in history,” he suggested that a leadership dispute on campus led to the momentary decline of SNCC in Little Rock.

Worth Long was the representative from Philander Smith College at most SNCC meetings, because he was a natural leader who made his presence felt early and often in Little Rock. Along with Thomas Quaymon, of Accra, Ghana, Long ate lunch without incident at a white restaurant in the Greyhound bus station, but he denied that he was staging a formal demonstration. Long did not avoid arrest, however, after he and eight other students requested service at a segregated lunch counter in Walgreens. When the store manager closed the counter and asked them to leave, the students remained in their seats and demanded service, which


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prompted the manager to call the police and have them arrested for “refusing to leave a business establishment after being requested to do so by the owner or manager.”

Long’s arrest served as a galvanizing force for more than one hundred students at Philander Smith College, who, behind the leadership of the Arkansas Council on Community Affairs (ACCA), organized a march to protest segregation in downtown Little Rock. Serious behind the scenes negotiations led a group of black leaders in Little Rock to support the students fully and post one thousand dollars bail to secure the release of Long. After earning the trust and support of over six hundred students, Long and the ACCA made a profound impact on local business and forced the white power structure to request a meeting with the group. Possessing a “good human relations sense,” one colleague recalled, Long played a major role in negotiating the speedy and incident-free integration of downtown businesses in one week.

He had, in essence, “cracked Little Rock in seven days,” as he liked to put it, which earned him an opportunity to rise up the ladder in SNCC. He dropped out of college and accepted the position of Staff Coordinator in Atlanta. In his organizing duties for five states, including Mississippi, Long helped develop “strategies of confrontation and change” alongside other leaders in SNCC, such as John Lewis, Julian Bond, Fannie Lou Hamer, Bob Moses, and even Marion Barry, who Long considered at that time a “firebrand…a revolutionary dude.”

Some activists may have recognized the origins of freedom songs in white working-class tunes, or “people’s songs,” which brought people together in love and understanding as well as

60 Riva, “Desegregating Downtown Little Rock,” 279.
swelled with the “blood and thunder” to make folks understand the truth. By employing non-violent protest strategies as well as a range of cultural tactics based on singing and oration, SNCC instilled courage and a sense of purpose among its core groups of young activists. The organization adapted spirituals and work songs to their organizing needs, developing a particular “movement culture,” as Long so eloquently put it. One of the most powerful elements of SNCC’s movement culture was, indeed, the fabrication and performance of freedom songs, the majority of which drew upon the music of the black churches. Rather than popular music or opera, SNCC converted and transformed old black spirituals and labor songs into a more commanding, useful tool in the struggle. SNCC and its allies “secularized the songs and made them liberation songs,” which assuaged fear, proffered a feeling of strength and solidarity, and encouraged action. Though no rational individual would march a dozen frightened people against an angry police force, one inspired leader could evoke fearless determination in the hearts of a couple hundred people through song and march through column after column of “peace officers.” The freedom songs, by and large, conveyed uplifting messages of hope and perseverance that told the stories of different sites of struggle. The “major” freedom songs, such as “We Shall Overcome,” “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn us Around,” and “This May Be the Last Time,” were much more than a reflection of traditional black music. Many of the songs were inflected, modified, and adapted by certain people outside of the black freedom struggle. As Bernice Reagon explains, black unionists and Pete Seeger had a hand in shaping the song,

64 For more of the important role of freedom songs in the black freedom struggle, see Pete Seeger and Bob Reiser, Everybody Says Freedom (New York: Norton, 1989); Kerran Sanger, When the Spirit Says Sing!: The Role of Freedom Songs in the Civil Rights Movement (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1995); and Mary C. Turck, Freedom Song: Young Voices and the Struggle for Civil Rights (Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 2008).
65 McGehee, “‘You Do Not Own What You Cannot Control,’” 16.
“We Shall Overcome,” for its use in the movement. Long believed they also drew on a “real sense” of experience within the black community. As he recognized the important role of freedom songs in the movement, he attached a new significance to the foundational elements of folk material.

During his tenure as staff coordinator for SNCC, Long became more and more passionate about seeking out the “folk” in black communities. He often entertained himself by “going up to people and talking to them,” in hopes of gaining some “folk wisdom,” and he claimed to have found “music and songs and lullabies” in almost every town he visited in his five states. Former SNCC organizer Euvester Simpson, in recent interview, explained how, “Worth used to come to town and he stayed at our house many a nights, you know, whenever he would come through and need a place to stay. And Worth was really involved, and he was an oral historian. He liked to go out in the countryside and just talk to regular people and find out what was going on.” Due to the nature of his work with SNCC, however, Long did not conduct any field recordings of folk material. “I couldn’t do that and do what I was doing,” he explained, but he gained valuable experience in approaching the keepers of local tradition. Though he eventually gave up his expensive tape recorder so that the organization could document the myriad of sounds and freedom songs at mass meetings, Long recognized the potential for innovation through black folk music and increasingly attached imperatives to its study, documentation, and performance.

Long’s arrival in Atlanta presaged an increase in the number of nonviolent direct-action campaigns as well as white resistance in the deep South. In mid-April 1963, believing it “better

68 McGehee, “‘You Do Not Own What You Cannot Control,’” 16.
to go to jail in dignity than accept segregation in humility,” Martin Luther King Jr. sat “alone for days in the dull monotony of a narrow jail cell” in Birmingham. “no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair.”

Two weeks later four thousand black children marched into the heart of the city to protest segregation, and the subsequent broadcast of city police violently assaulting them sparked outrage across the nation, forcing elite whites in Birmingham to accept a deal with movement leaders. The victory bolstered the morale of civil rights activists and inspired almost eight hundred demonstrations and fifteen hundred arrests over the next ten weeks.

In the state capital of Jackson, Mississippi, NAACP field secretary Medgar Evers was at the sharp end of a militant campaign to end racial segregation. After the mayor rejected his demands for fair employment and integration in a locally televised speech, Evers received an equal amount of air time to deliver a warning that history had “reached a turning point…in the racial picture” and “things will never be as they once were” in the South. On the night of June 11, President John F. Kennedy buttressed this “turning point” in the televised announcement of his intention to send a major civil rights bill to Congress. Such an important step forward on behalf of the federal government had surely imbued a sense of fulfillment in Medgar Evers as he returned from one of his many meetings, pulled into the driveway, and stepped out of his car just after midnight. As he walked anxiously to his front door, a hidden assassin shot him in the back with an Enfield rifle. His wife went “hysterical” at the sight of her husband, which attracted the attention of neighbors who called the police.

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their father as he lay face down in a pool of blood. Evers, having been shot through the heart, died less than hour later, while the blood-spattered sweatshirts, bearing the words “Jim Crow Must Go,” which he planned to distribute in the black community, remained in the driveway for several hours.  

The murder of Medgar Evers occurred at the same time the movement ground to a halt in the Delta. Though the federal government promised to prosecute the perpetrators of racial violence, the Justice Department had dropped its suit against the Greenwood police department, which stood accused of attacking SNCC leaders with police dogs as they attempted to register to vote. The police in Winona, in addition, had recently arrested and forced two black men to deliver brutal beatings to SNCC activists, including Fannie Lou Hamer, who were on their way back from a training session at the Highlander Folk School. Though the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) arrested white supremacist Byron De La Beckwith on the day after the murder of Medgar Evers, the state failed to convict him in two trials, each due to the failure of all-white, male juries to reach a verdict. Governor Ross Barnett even showed up at the second trial to shake hands with the accused assassin, which reflected the position of the white power structure regarding racial violence. As white supremacists increasingly exhibited a woeful lack of conscience and white society refused repeatedly to convict the murderers, the courageous civil rights workers in SNCC realized that nonviolence was not a viable strategy in Mississippi.

Medgar Evers, in fact, had long possessed an awareness of the need for armed resistance. “He was anything but nonviolent,” NAACP southern regional director Ruby Hurley declared,

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75 David Stout, “Byron DeLa Beckwith Dies; Killer of Medgar Evers was 80,” NYT, Jan 23, 2001.
“anything but!” The national leadership of the NAACP, nevertheless, discouraged Evers from promoting his beliefs in retaliatory violence and convinced him that the articulation of a more conciliatory, nonviolent approach was best to advance the black freedom struggle. Like Evers, the determined, homegrown southern organizers in SNCC maintained a public posture of nonviolence, but in the background advocated armed self-defense. In the summer of 1963, black activists recognized that the image of armed blacks was not “good public relations,” but they nevertheless possessed weapons as a matter of survival.77 In light of white supremacists firebombing the homes of blacks and shooting the families as they ran outside, Worth Long encouraged the practice of armed self-defense, particularly in the home. As SNCC staff coordinator, he believed “everybody should have a shotgun over their door…to defend their home.”78 In one interview, Long explains the rationale for advocating armed self-defense in SNCC:

> The concept of armed self-defense is what you talk about before revolutionary violence if it becomes necessary. And I had studied some of this because it was my orientation to understand, not military strategy but survival strategy in the community. There were people who were better schooled than I was but, as Staff Coordinator, I thought it was very important to have an alternative to non-violence, especially if you had not been given your citizenship rights. You had not just a legal basis and a constitutional basis but a basis out here in the world to enforce. To not let someone negate your human rights. If you let that happen, then you are always in danger, it seems to me. Now you can pray with them or pray for ‘em, but if they kill you in the meantime you are not going to be an effective organizer posthumously.79

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77 Ibid., 49.
78 McGehee, “‘You Do Not Own What You Cannot Control,’” 17.
79 McGehee, “‘You Do Not Own What You Cannot Control,’” 18.
In early July 1963, Worth Long and other SNCC leaders came to help the beleaguered SNCC activists in Greenwood, who desperately needed some outside support and attention to continue the struggle amid random shootings and arson attacks. While the commitment of local people remained strong, SNCC hoped to attract both by staging a folk festival about three miles south of the city on the farm of the indomitable McGhee family, who, in the opinion of Stokely Carmichael, “asked and gave no quarter” and “never ‘took low’ for anyone.”\textsuperscript{80} The McGhees were black landowners and farmers, who enjoyed autonomy from white society and, therefore, could not be easily coerced by the economic intimidation tactics of the white Citizens’ Council. Worth Long and other activists recognized that folk music possessed the power to “reach blacks who could not be reached through rhetoric and speech.”\textsuperscript{81} By convincing popular white folk singers, such as Pete Seeger, Theodore Bikel, and a young songwriter and guitarist named Bob Dylan, to give free performances on the same bill as the SNCC Freedom Singers, the event reinvigorated the interest of nationwide media outlets. The producers of the festival, therefore, scheduled a series of speeches from gifted orators and movement leaders such as SNCC chairman John Lewis and SNCC executive director James Forman, who came from Atlanta to stress the importance of registering black voters in Mississippi. Offering much more than a morale boost, the festival also ushered in a united front among blacks in support of voter registration.\textsuperscript{82}

Realizing that the widely-promoted folk festival might attract some attention from local whites and the sheriff’s department in Leflore County, SNCC appointed a security team who did

\textsuperscript{81} Sam Block, the first SNCC activist to come to the Delta, expressed this revelation to one reporter; see, “Folk Singers use Sharecropper Shack for Integration Session.” \textit{Chicago (IL) Daily Defender}, July 08, 1963.
their best to control the festival environment. Sam Block, a sharp dressing 23-year-old and former student at Mississippi Vocational College (now Mississippi Valley State University), who initiated SNCC’s first registration campaign in the Delta, complained about the sheriff putting up “No Parking” signs on both sides of Highway 82. Worth Long worked the security detail with Casey Hayden, who understood the tactics and strategies to deal with the police, who repeatedly drove up and down the highway. Several groups of white folks showed up to check out the spectacle, and three cars full of white men parked in a lane across the highway. Even though Long removed the “No Parking” signs, the local police diligently patrolled the highways and ordered all sightseers off the shoulder. The highway patrol even stationed two officers in a patrol car along the road. Though no incidents occurred at the festival, Greenwood city police picked up, questioned, and threatened to kill a white organizer affiliated with the Committee on Appeal for Human Rights (CAHR), an affiliate of SNCC in Atlanta.83 The city police also picked up 20-year-old CAHR worker Anna Jo Weaver later that night as she walked home from the SNCC office; the officers lectured her about “breaking God’s law” in her association with blacks and sent her on her way.84

SNCC planned to start the festival at ten in the morning on July 6, 1963, but the blistering heat in upwards of a hundred degrees forced them to postpone the entertainment until late in the afternoon.85 Having already been in town and performed twice at local events, Pete Seeger was the first of the visiting folk singers to climb onto the back of a truck and perform for a group of people largely unfamiliar with his music and popularity.86 He initially took the crowd on a

84 Ibid.
85 “Northern Folk Singers Help Out at Negro Festival in Mississippi,” NYT, July 7, 1963.
“musical tour of Africa with two South African songs,” Seeger settled into more familiar material to finish off the opening set of the festival, which invited the vocal contributions of the audience. Stirred by the participatory, integrated nature of the songfest, SNCC chairman John Lewis stepped up and declared, “This is the first time in the history of the Delta that black and white are standing and singing together,” and he hoped to make it a common occurrence and fight until “all citizens of the state have equal rights.”

The first public gathering that featured an interracial audience in the Delta attracted an overwhelmingly black audience of about three hundred people. While some reports estimated attendance levels as low as two hundred people and the organizers claimed more than four hundred showed up, the New York Times reported a mostly black crowd of about 250-300 people. To increase attendance, SNCC field secretaries brought a busload of people out of Jackson, many of whom had been arrested in civil rights demonstrations, and four carloads of whites and blacks made a perilous drive down from Haywood and Fayette County, Tennessee. SNCC had only recently permitted whites to work in the Delta, particularly in Greenwood, where the leaders later opposed bringing in students from the Ivy League in Freedom Summer. The sprinkling of whites in the audience were mostly young people, or the white camera crew of New York filmmaker Ed Emshwiller. Pete Seeger, in a later report in Broadside, described the crowd as “several hundred of the most enthusiastic freedom fighters and singers” in the United States.

Tim Jenkins, a SNCC trainer and former student body president at Howard College, served as emcee for the event while former Rust College student and Tallahatchie County native Willie Peacock performed a couple of freedom songs and encouraged the audience to sing along.

on “Get on Board,” an old African-American spiritual published first in 1872, which Sam Block altered to discuss the poor treatment of blacks by former Governor Ross Barnett. Theodore Bikel, actor, singer, and former refugee from Hitler let the crowd know, “I’ve been in this movement with you since the day I was born.” Bob Dylan climbed onto the truck and chose to unveil his interpretation of the recent murder of NAACP leader Medgar Evers, a song called “Only a Pawn in Their Game.” The lyrical content of the song, by all accounts, grabbed the attention of grassroots civil rights workers, and its political analysis elicited a strong appeal. Rejecting the moralist, utopian rhetoric of the nonviolent direct action campaigns, Dylan asserted that racial violence was a product of political coercion and unjust social relations. In one set of lines, he suggested that the concept of race was the result of the carefully constructed racial discourse of white, southern elites. To divide the lower class in the South, Dylan explains, poor whites were taught:

That the laws are with him
To protect his white skin,
To keep up his hate,
So he never thinks straight
'Bout the shape that he’s in

By exposing the “divide-and-rule strategy” of elite whites and emphasizing the connection between poverty and racism, Dylan made an impression on the young activists in the audience,

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91 Mike Marqusee, Wicked Messenger: Bob Dylan and the 1960s; Chimes of Freedom (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), 81-82.
many of whom had started to re-evaluate the nature of the struggle in the deep South.\textsuperscript{93} In one interview with Robert Shelton, SNCC Freedom Singer Bernice Reagon credited Dylan as being the first songwriter to expose how the “poor white was as victimized by discrimination as the poor black.”\textsuperscript{94} Impressed by the way in which he had opened the eyes of some folks in SNCC, Reagon admitted that she never felt quite so close to the northern-born songwriter.

Dylan’s performance of “Blowin’ in the Wind” in the back of a truck made an impression on Worth Long, particularly due to the sudden interruption of several whites in a red convertible, who drove over from the Greenwood Moose Lodge and started to play “Dixie” on a pair of trumpets and a saxophone. Once the antagonistic brass instruments went silent, however, the proud, young southerners recognized the fastest selling single in history at the time and realized, “Damn, that’s Bob Dylan.” The driver, therefore, pulled the car over to the side of the road and remained silent for the rest of his set. Even though they did not “come out [and] join the festival,” Long recognized that Dylan was “singing their song,” an “anthem for youth, not just for freedom but for youth [and] they recognized themselves in his music.” Long believed that moment was “very important,” because it demonstrated the power of individual—as opposed to participatory—musical exhibitions to bring people together, if only for a moment, regardless of race, class, or gender—even in the heart of the Delta.\textsuperscript{95} His assertion is not antithetical to the earlier realization about the power of the participatory folk community. Long believed that individual genius, though rare, contained revelatory potential, especially in the right setting and circumstances.

\textsuperscript{93} New York filmmaker Ed Emshwiller included his performance of “Only a Pawn in Their Game” in his 1963 documentary \textit{The Streets of Greenwood} and it also appears in D. A. Pennebaker’s Dylan documentary, \textit{Don’t Look Back} (1967); see, Mike Marqusee, \textit{Wicked Messenger: Bob Dylan and the 1960s; Chimes of Freedom} (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), 81-82.


\textsuperscript{95} McGehee, “‘You Do Not Own What You Cannot Control,’” 16.
The very real potential of racial violence was in the back of everyone’s mind, and fear hung like a heavy fog over the open field. Once darkness fell on the festival, the crowd of a few hundred dwindled down to only a few brave souls. In the flat, blackness of the Delta, as one local put it, “it would be too tempting for a sniper to stand in that corn field and pick one of ‘em off.” The festival, nevertheless, proceeded into the night as all the musicians—Dylan, Seeger, Bikel, and the SNCC Freedom Singers—climbed onto the back of the truck and concluded with participatory renditions of “Blowin’ in the Wind” as well as “We Shall Overcome.” Even though local blacks did not know about the popularity of the folk singers, Bernice Reagon asserted, they were “happy to be getting support” and seemed especially fond of Bob Dylan “down there in the cotton country.” The unusual event also provided somewhat of a distraction to local activists, and SNCC emerged with a new sense of purpose in Greenwood and even garnered the long-withheld support of local ministers, which established a unified front for voter registration in the black community.

Dylan delivered a repeat performance to an integrated audience of about 200,000 people who came together in the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on August 28, 1963. Several civil rights and religious groups organized the rally to shed light on the political and social challenges of African Americans, and Martin Luther King Jr.’s call for racial equality and human rights in his “I Have a Dream” speech marked the culmination of this key moment in the growing black freedom struggle.

Only a couple of weeks later, the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham transfixed the nation in horror with film footage of the bodies of four young girls covered with sheets being removed from the smoldering ruins of, what most locals saw as, a beacon for the movement. Worth Long and SNCC staffer Julian Bond, coincidentally, had flown into the city that morning from Atlanta. Though they rented a car and planned on driving to Selma, the two veteran activists had learned about the bombing before takeoff and, in their growing state of disbelief, felt an overwhelming urge to visit the bombed-out church.

Despite having led countless demonstrations, sat through endless strategy sessions, and faced down groups of the most intransigent racists, nothing could have prepared them for pulling up and seeing the broken, mangled heaps of rubble around the church. “An overpowering wave of disgust that soon turned into anger,” as one historian put it, came over Worth Long as he thought about the bloody, burnt bodies of the “martyred heroines.”

Bond and the highly disturbed field coordinator drove to Selma, where the plan was to coordinate the efforts of SNCC’s Alabama Voter Education Project (AVEP). In a haze of anger, however, Long led a hastily-organized demonstration of five hundred students after two more bombs exploded in the black community. The police identified him almost immediately as a leader and arrested him on charges of contributing to the delinquency of a minor; the police also arrested forty-two of his student followers. After receiving a beating in the Birmingham jail, he and several others served the remainder of their sentences at a work camp in neighboring Wilcox County, which had a “tough reputation” and severe lack of tolerance for black agitation. Upon release, the young, brash field coordinator not only resumed the tough task of organizing blacks in Dallas County,

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100 Martin Luther King Jr. referred to the four girls as “martyred heroines of a holy crusade for freedom and human dignity” at their funeral; see, Fleming, In the Shadow of Selma, 152.
but he also could not resist checking the potential of “cracking” the infamous Wilcox County. He managed to locate some interested local people in the community of Gee’s Bend, but incongruent perspectives based on class made it hard to persuade middle-class blacks to give up their “investment in the system,” join forces with the poor, and establish a viable local movement for civil rights.102

Frustrated at his lack of success in Alabama, shell-shocked from his experiences with racial violence and worn-out from his incessant responsibilities as project director, Long took a leave of absence from SNCC to study poetry at Harvard in the summer of 1964.103 His absence, however, did not impede the organizing efforts of SNCC. Indeed, the student organization launched its most revolutionary campaign against the white power structure in Mississippi. SNCC did not commit a large amount of resources to the Delta until the summer of 1964, but the young, largely native group of activists and song leaders such as Fannie Lou Hamer, Willie Peacock, and Sam Block exhibited such passionate energy and enthusiasm for organizing in the politically promising region that it seemed like an army to some white Mississippians. Having organized in the state in the early 1960s, Peacock explained the driving force and dangerous pace of his activities:

In one day we’d drive out to help some organizers in Clarksdale, then go over to Sunflower County and go over to Ruleville, where Mrs. Hamer lived, and take some people down to vote, then we’d go on to Greenwood to get ready for a mass meeting at night…We were so busy, some days we didn’t even eat! Everything I’ve heard about soldiers in combat describes us—the never-ending tension, the exhaustion, the constant danger. We were guerrillas. The difference was we weren’t going in to fight and win, we were teaching people who were already there how they could win. You don’t liberate people—you teach them how to liberate themselves.104

102 Fleming, In the Shadow of Selma, 153.
Due to the publication of the SNCC songbook *We Shall Overcome* in 1963 as well as the coverage and promotion of freedom songs in such magazines as *Broadside* and *Sing Out*, the organization attracted some attention for its popular development of “movement culture.” The radical white supremacists in Mississippi certainly paid more attention, preparing for war against the student activists, after SNCC announced its plans to launch a massive voter registration and cultural education campaign called the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project of 1964. Grounded in the principles of participatory democracy, each element of the project—freedom schools, voter registration, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party—developed out of the unwavering belief in developing local “people’s ability to govern themselves.”

The 1964 Freedom Summer project, indeed, changed the nature of the black freedom struggle in the Delta. With some intellectual and physical assistance from the outside world, SNCC’s education for liberation programs aimed to destroy the psychological shackles that held black southerners in mental bondage. Their educational agenda reflected the foundational doctrine and beliefs of the Highlander Folk School, which empowered individuals with the knowledge to effect social change. Myles Horton, co-founder of the institution, explained, “For people to be really free they must have the power to make decisions about their lives, so that they can acquire knowledge as tools to change society. The people that conceived all the programs held a radical philosophy: the system was bad and had to be changed. They all had a revolutionary purpose.”

The unconquerable spirit and patient counsel of Ella Baker further embedded the grassroots leadership philosophy in SNCC. More than anyone else, she helped usher in the next

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106 Ibid., 184.
generation of civil rights activists. SNCC activist and journalist Joanne Grant, in her 1998 biography *Ella Baker: Freedom Bound*, reveals her seminal sentiments about student organizing:

> The chief emphasis I tried to make was their right to make their own decision…The only reason that I became relevant…was because I had lived through certain experiences and had had certain opportunities to gather information and organizational experience…I have always felt that if there is any time in our existence that you have a right to make mistakes it should be when you’re young, cause you have some time to live down some of the mistakes, or to offset them.  

Drawing on the principles of Baker and endless strategizing meetings at Highlander, SNCC followed through with its promise to open freedom schools, launch voter registration campaigns, and establish an independent political party, the MFDP. In defiance of racial subjugation as well as the status quo in Mississippi politics, the education for liberation programs dissuaded people from taking orders and respecting experts; rather, student activists taught local people to make their own decisions, take action based on those decisions, and work with other people to overturn the exploitative and racist system of oppression.  

SNCC had established the new practices and tactics prior to the arrival of summer volunteers, who traveled to various project sites to sustain and help improve the efforts of local people.

SNCC also wanted to build upon the success of the 1963 festival on McGhee’s farm. To expand the role of folk singers in 1964, the organization established the cultural arm of the summer project: the Mississippi Caravan of Music (MCM). Under the direction of folklorist and folk singer Robert Cohen, the singers/songwriters traveled to freedom schools and community centers for short visits to boost the morale of SNCC workers and teach workshops on the history

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of black song, particularly the themes of liberation and deliverance.\textsuperscript{109}Sponsored by the New York Council of Performing Artists and its chairman Gil Turner, the caravan included an estimated twenty-five performing artists, including Pete Seeger, the Chad Mitchell Trio, Theodore Bikel and the SNCC Freedom Singers.\textsuperscript{110} The songwriters who performed on the MCM, such as Phil Ochs, used blunt, confrontational lyrics. In regard to SNCC’s mission to upend the social, economic, and political status quo, the MCM served as much more than an educational platform; it also provided a host of new rallying cries, proved an effective recruitment tool, focused national attention on the hardscrabble existence of black Mississippians, and shamed the perpetrators of Jim Crow.

Introducing a new type of lyric to the communities, the songwriters helped black folks who had been shut out of the political process to write their own scripts of liberation. Many of the ballads and ditties, such as Phil Ochs’ “Here’s to the State of Mississippi,” Len Chandler’s “Move on Over,” and Malvina Reynolds’ “It Isn’t Nice” contained the style of hard-hitting, provocative lyrics that thrilled outside activists and local people, as well as upset white folks of all stripes who supported racial segregation. The celebrity status of some participants in the MCM lured some white students to concerts, which resulted in increasingly integrated audiences and further agitated segregationists. By siding with an enemy of the state, the musicians put themselves in harm’s way for short stints, but not one person ever attacked the troubadours of the MCM. Many other local, homegrown agitators who continued to work in the state did not fare as well in the all-out campaign against racial oppression.

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{110}“Freedom Schools,” MSC Files, SCR ID # 2-166-3-31-4-1-1.
\end{footnotesize}
Considering the popularity of folk music, as well as the potential economic impetus of freedom songs, the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO, which included members of CORE, SCLC, and the NAACP, but was dominated by SNCC) moved to organize a larger folk festival in August at the Jackson Coliseum, featuring an integrated lineup of such popular singers as Peter, Paul, and Mary and gospel singer Mahalia Jackson. The Mississippi Fair Commission, however, denied their request based on two reasons: 1) COFO’s status as a “political organization” and 2) it lacked incorporation and had no legal authority to sign contracts with the coliseum. Since COFO “could not legally be held responsible for any damages,” argued one assistant state attorney general, the commission had no choice but to deny the request. Though Boston attorney Anna Cooper filed a lawsuit on behalf of COFO, which argued that the commission had discriminated against the group and called for an “end to segregation practices” at the coliseum, US District Court Judge Harold Cox refused to order the commission to rent the coliseum to the civil rights coalition, citing it was “financially irresponsible.”

The state commissioner of agriculture in Mississippi had ordered the fair commission to “drop racial barriers” and cease operating on a “discriminatory basis” in July, but it had denied requests from other “radical” groups, such as the John Birch Society and Americans for the Preservation of the White Race (APWR).

The decision of the fair commission was indicative of the larger decline of the southern market for large blues and folk music concerts in the early 1960s, which record producer and concert promoter Al Smith attributed to the heightened state of racial tensions during the Civil Rights Movement. In one interview with blues biographer Sheldon Harris, Smith recalled how

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111 The refusal of the commission, she also argued, would cause “irreparable harm” to COFO, which may have not helped her case in Mississippi; see, “Federal Judge Studies Plea,” *LLC*, Aug 15, 1964, p.2.
he used to book shows in the large city auditoriums, the only venues with air conditioning, but in the mid-1960s he could not rent them in the South. Whereas he used to promote two shows during Jim Crow—one for whites and one for blacks—everyone attended a single performance after the breakdown of segregation. Even before the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, musicians who had no qualms about performing in smaller segregated venues cancelled their shows at the Jackson Coliseum, fearing that such a large crowd could incite a riot.113 Local southern officials, he asserted, recognized that folk and blues concerts might attract large numbers of blacks and whites, and they could not support such an interracial gathering, believing it might result in civil unrest.114 Smith’s assertions offer insight into the motivating factors behind the decision of Judge Cox, who believed that the folk festival had the potential to spark serious unrest and lead to considerable property damage. The coliseum was “new and well decorated and a well-kept facility,” Cox declared in his opinion, “and no responsible manager would be justified in turning over such a facility to such financially irresponsible persons.”115 It was the lack of access to larger, air-conditioned venues that forced COFO to stage workshops and festivals on the properties of sympathetic institutions and black landowners, many of whom offered up their land and set about protecting their guests. The black-owned farms and institutions that became so important as safe havens during the black freedom struggle also provided the crucial spaces—outside the purview of white control—for the staging of rock and blues festivals in the Delta.

113 In January 1964, New Orleans musician Al Hirt cancelled his performances at the coliseum out of fear over sparking a race riot; see, *IET*, Jan 30, 1964, p.1.
114 Al Smith, interview by Sheldon Harris, late-1960s, file name: harris sheldon_audio_015, Blues Archive, University of Mississippi.
Outside the framework of the MCM, SNCC organizers and freedom singers continued to cultivate and incorporate culture into the agenda in new and radical ways. Not too long after attending the Newport (Rhode Island) Folk Festival in 1963, where he conversed with folklorist Ralph Rinzler and witnessed the glorification of Mississippi-born blues artists as musical geniuses, Worth Long started to take issue with the musical exhibitions at the folk festival on the McGhee farm. Despite the media coverage and other incentives of the brave, inspiring performances in support of black suffrage, he disliked the festival’s complete reliance on outside talent. He could not believe that “in Mississippi, the birthplace of the blues,” that “no blues musicians” performed at the first interracial gathering and “folk festival” in the Delta. Even though he knew of several local musicians and singers who might have played, the organizers focused on bringing in popular white folk singers and “never asked” about including local artists.\(^\text{116}\)

Mississippi blues singers were not in the vanguard of the Civil Rights Movement. Only a few local blues and folk singers, in fact, had ever expressed much interest in participating in civil rights protests, especially so close to home. According to biographer Phillip Ratcliffe, for example, the much-beloved Avalon, Mississippi native and folk singer John Hurt “seemed oblivious to the continuing civil rights struggles in his homeland.”\(^\text{117}\) Worth Long, thinking back in 1979, could not remember one blues musician in the state with a civil rights arrest record.\(^\text{118}\) The elder black musicians, moreover, faced the increasingly widespread rejection of traditional


African American culture among more educated, middle-class blacks. Due to the “changing attitudes among students” who “ridiculed folk artists” so much “that they refused to attend,” folklorist Bruce Bastin argues, the first black-organized festival concerned with secular black folk music, the Fort Valley Rural Folk Festival at Fort Valley College in Georgia, which began in 1940, came to an end in the mid-1950s.119

The militant black student activists of the early sixties, by and large, embraced a similar attitude; black folk music, to them, represented the oppression of whites under Jim Crow, and they were ashamed of it. Ohio native Len Chandler, who later embraced his musical heritage as a folk singer, explained his attitude as a college student:

“I went through this scene, man. I was ashamed of Grandmother’s music. I went to school to get the degrees, in Akron, and things were all put up in a nice little box, a package of the Western World’s music. But there was nothing in that box about my music. Why, even the spirituals were fitted out for a white audience, made to sound nice and polite—you know the bit.”120

Similar to the experience of Worth Long, whose revelation came after consulting a white folklorist and hearing the cheers of a white audience, Len Chandler came to understand the authentic nature and vitality of older forms of black music from a white professor, who took him to his house to listen to old records. “It took a white man to teach me—about my own music,” he asserted, “what my music is about…why this music” was so great. Blinded by the commercial recording industry and its promotion of popular music on records, radios and televisions, Chandler had never really heard it before that day, but he quickly realized, “this is it, man, this is the stuff.”121 The awakened attitudes of black activists such as Long and Chandler

121 Ibid.
reflect the broader, international movement to revive “true Negro folk music,” which fed from four directions—the British invasion, ethnomusicology scholars, young whites involved in the movement, and young blacks who, as one writer for the Southern Patriot put it, possessed “an inner freedom and sense of dignity won in struggle,” no longer felt “ashamed of traditions of the past,” and “discovered a beauty and strength in the culture of their forefathers.”

The cultural chasm among student activists over the sustainability of sacred and secular black folk music in the contemporary struggle for civil rights inspired a lively debate at the May 1964 “Festival of Negro Folk Music and Freedom Songs.” Held at the Old Gammon Theological Building in Atlanta, the program attracted the participation of civil rights leaders such as Fannie Lou Hamer, Bernice Reagon, and Doc Reese, many of whom led individual sessions on song-leading and song writing techniques. The only workshop not oriented towards group performance in a movement context was the session on traditional black folk music, in which participants learned about the political themes of resistance in song. After a performance of old slave songs by the Georgia Sea Island Singers, Baptist minister and SNCC co-founder Charles Sherrod posed a question to the group of young freedom fighters who possessed well-developed understandings of freedom music. “Why?” he asked, “Why sing those [old] songs here?” Len Chandler supported the position of Bessie Jones, a staunch advocate of perpetuating black folk traditions and member of the Georgia Sea Island Singers, who offered a prompt and confident explanation of the innovative elements of protest to historical conditions that reflected the longer struggle for freedom. Under slavery, she explained, “we could not read, and the master thought he would trap us with no existence, he thought we could do nothing about

it. But we did, even as children, with this music. And it is our own, it is ours, it came from ourselves.”

The cogent argument of Jones, however, failed to convince several people in attendance, which eventually led to a heated exchange of opinions. Birmingham Choir director Carlton Reese understood the importance of learning about the development of “slave songs,” but he did not believe that all of the songs, particularly those invoking negative black stereotypes, were helpful in the black freedoms struggle. Tom Paxton agreed with Reese, but he called for a more nuanced analysis of black culture and Jim Crow. Only by identifying elements of racist discourse and rejecting such negative impositions, he believed, could blacks “seize on what was solid” in the music and make it useful to the struggle. Though in agreement about the potential need for these songs in the future, the amazing Birmingham Freedom Choir soloist Cleo Kennedy went so far as to discard them entirely as invalid in the current struggle. Her outright condemnation of black folk music signaled a very sharp, personal turn in the nature of the debate, as a small young woman, weighing about ninety pounds, who was left to rot in jail for two months in Americus, Georgia, rose to her feet in anger. The seething eyes of Amanda Bowen flashed sparks as she exclaimed, “I'm tired of going to church and listening to teenagers giggle and laugh when the old songs are sung. I want to know what the old songs are. I want to sing them. I want to know that my parents were working for 15 cents a day. What these songs are is what most of this means!” Her impassioned and angry declaration elicited the first enthusiastic applause and shouts of “Amen.” There was no doubt, as one participant put it, “that child can speak, now!” The workshop revealed the activist’s different understandings of

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125 Ibid.
traditional black music as well as the tension between traditional black music and the personal, politicized nature of freedom songs. Song leaders such as Bessie Jones maintained that traditional music reflected the same virtues and identities of the contemporary struggle, but other folks perceived the movement as breaking up traditions, certainly attempting to distance itself from the past. The conflict demonstrated, according to one historian, that political contention was not an inherent element in folk music; rather, the relationship between them relied on the conscious infusion of discursive political strategies.\textsuperscript{126}

The debate over the political valence of traditional African American culture drove a wedge between student activists and threatened the spirit of interracial cooperation. In the beginning, freedom songs served as a source of strength and unified activists across racial boundaries. As SNCC workers started to doubt the tenets of nonviolence and discover the extant elements of African and African American culture, however, the nature of solidarity in the struggle shifted from interracial to intra-racial. The freedom songs, as well as their predecessors in black folk music, became a major source of racial pride and the “authentic” property of African Americans, which impelled many white radicals to later shift their focus from civil rights to other, largely white campaigns. In spite of the attempts of two generations to bring blacks and whites together through folk music, the interracial movement for civil rights fell apart alongside the increasing bifurcation driven by the increasing popularity of soul music.

The racial divide, however, had always been relatively clear in the Mississippi Delta.\textsuperscript{127} Until Freedom Summer, SNCC made sure that most of its organizers were African Americans, and the massive influx of white students did not sit well at all with some of the more influential,


homegrown black student activists, whose tireless dedication in the early years not only laid the foundations for local agitation but also instilled a sense of pride in doing it without the help of whites. One of the central detractors of the summer project was Tallahatchie County native Willie Peacock. “Quick-witted, passionate, [and] with a talent for healing,” as one author described him, Peacock became involved in the movement while earning his degree at Rust College. Though he planned to start medical school in the fall of 1962, SNCC leaders Amzie Moore and Robert Moses heard about his leadership abilities, visited him at home in Holly Springs, and convinced him to help Sam Block register black voters out of a small office in Greenwood. Peacock and Block were both equally courageous and committed to challenging the white power structure, which fostered a mutual level of respect as well as a lasting friendship between the two young men. Having grown up in Mississippi, Peacock accepted the guidance of outside leaders in SNCC, but he also believed that the organization was “on his turf,” and he did not want anything to undermine the current efforts and momentum of local blacks. He stood in rigid opposition to the importation of white volunteers during Freedom Summer. He did not want blacks folks to experience “somebody from the outside helping to change their lives,” because it would counteract the “whole style” of developing an “internal force” of “pride and self-respect that made up the important groundwork for a brand of freedom that would be lasting in the Delta.”

While the interracial project received support from several influential and popular black leaders, who believed that the project would bring national attention to the plight of black

Mississippians, COFO moved forward despite the continued protests of Peacock and others. Since he was one of the most important and influential organizers in the Delta, some folks feared he might “sabotage” the implementation of the organizing project. SNCC, therefore, suggested that he take a leave of absence during the summer of 1964. Peacock travelled to New York for a while, received some medical treatment, and then travelled to Madison, Wisconsin, where he spent the summer recuperating and attending fundraising concerts of the SNCC Freedom Singers. Still hoping to study medicine, he returned south to Alabama and enrolled in graduate school that fall at the Tuskegee Institute, located in the Macon County seat, a stronghold of black political power.\footnote{In 1965, the black voting majority in the Macon County seat of Tuskegee elected two black city councilors, four others to county offices, and installed black officers on the police force; see, Robert J. Norrell, \textit{Reaping the Whirlwind: The Civil Rights Movement in Tuskegee} (New York: Knopf, 1985).}

The historic black institution was home to several activist professors and students as well as the Tuskegee Institute Advancement League (TIAL), an energetic civil rights group that entered into equal coalition with SNCC to encourage African Americans in the Black Belt counties to register to vote in late 1964. Before the end of the fall semester, Peacock had developed a strong connection with 21 year-old Samuel Younge Jr., a SNCC field secretary and TIAL leader, who recruited him serve as an advisor on campus and help TIAL. While racial violence had abated in Tuskegee, the increase of voter registration drives had the nervous forces of massive resistance on high alert on the evening of February 18, 1965, when the SCLC initiated a march of five hundred people to the Marion jail in Perry County. Alabama state troopers met the marchers in the street, started beating the protesters, and ended up shooting 27 year-old activist Jimmie Lee Jackson, who was trying to protect his mother.\footnote{“Riot Injured Alabama Negro Dies,” \textit{Augusta (GA) Chronicle}, Feb 27, 1965, p.14.} The murder of Jackson impelled James Bevel, of SCLC, to initiate the Selma to Montgomery March for voter
registration reform on March 7, which prompted state troopers to attack the marchers over the Edmund Pettus Bridge, which network television infamously branded “Bloody Sunday.” TIAL members Peacock and Younge Jr., along with another thousand protesters, responded with a second front on March 11.\footnote{Wazir Peacock, “What Did You Do During the Civil Rights Movement?” Civil Rights Movement Veterans, http://www.crmvet.org/faq/faqwhat.htm [accessed June 24, 2015].} Hoping to deliver a petition to Governor George Wallace, James Forman and most of the SNCC staff from Selma joined TIAL and marched in orderly fashion down the broad streets towards the state capital, where they met a force of two hundred state troopers massed in front of the capitol building, the Confederate flag flying high from its dome. Unable to hand the petition to the governor, however, the lions’ share of student activists returned home before long. Only an estimated one hundred die-hard protestors remained onsite, huddling under the street lights until early the next morning.\footnote{“Marchers Fail to See Wallace,” Bluefield (WV) Daily Telegraph, Mar 11, 1965, p.1.}

Back in Tuskegee, members of TIAL listened to a fiery speech by James Forman who warned America, “If we can’t sit at the table of democracy, we’ll knock the fucking legs off.”\footnote{Carson, In Struggle, 160.} After the second march of over two thousand black activists, white ministers, and historians, the president signed the 1965 Voting Rights Act into law, and Peacock began to advise the student body, and he noticed a thinly-veiled sense of self-loathing among many students. He could not believe how much they were “alienated from their own culture,” focusing instead on more resplendent symbols of middle-class distinction. Seeing such a disavowal of black culture and heritage, Peacock determined “to have it revived” towards the end of the spring semester.\footnote{Willie B. (Wazir) Peacock, interview, 2001, http://www.crmvet.org/vet/wazir.htm [accessed May 9, 2015].} In May, he decided to return to Mississippi and help put together a “Sing for Freedom” workshop at Mt. Beulah, a small college on a twenty-three acre campus in Edwards, Mississippi, located
twenty miles west of Jackson. Earlier in the year, the Delta Ministry had leased the property to serve as its headquarters and provide a “place of rest” for weary movement organizers.\footnote{James F. Findlay, \textit{Church People in the Struggle}, 121.} Co-sponsored by the Highlander Folk School, the Newport Folk Foundation, the Delta Ministry, and the National Council of Churches, the workshop in Edwards—similarly structured to the workshop in Atlanta before Freedom Summer—demonstrated the increasingly conflicting meanings of music in the black freedom struggle.

For the benefit of “Freedom Corps” volunteers, a large group of college-aged trainees serving one year in various communities throughout Mississippi, Bob Moses invited Guy and Candie Carawan to put on the three-day “Sing for Freedom” workshop beginning on May 7, 1965. Drawing on the Carawan’s musical preservation work on John’s Island, South Carolina, and partly due to the influence of homegrown activists Willie Peacock and Willie McGhee, the program focused on the importance of perpetuating “Southern Negro Folk Heritage,” such as spirituals, work songs, blues, children’s songs, folk tales, as well as the newer freedom songs.\footnote{“Sing for Freedom,” Wisconsin Historical Society, Freedom Summer Collection, MFDP--General papers, 1963-1965, part 2; Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party records, 1962-1971; Historical Society Library Microforms Room, Micro 788, Reel 1, Segment 2, Part 2.} According to one advertisement, the workshop session hoped to answer questions (such as What is Negro folk heritage? And what meaning has it for today?) and address the importance of “keeping meaningful traditions alive,” “developing community festivals,” and learning about the “folk roots of present day freedom singing.”\footnote{Ibid.} The three-day gathering also included musical performances by the Moving Star Hall Singers, the Georgia Sea Island Singers, Doc Rees, gang labor songs from Texas, the Mississippi Fife and Drum Corps, Mississippi blues singers, and other southern freedom singers.
Folklorists Alan Lomax and Ralph Rinzler, of the Newport Folk Foundation, also took part in, what one writer described as, a “contentious musical workshop.” With a strong record of support for the civil rights movement, Lomax envisioned a future that linked the struggle to a cultural revival in the black communities of Mississippi. In one session, he delivered a passionate speech on the significance of African American cultural traditions. Considering its salient influence on popular music, the abandonment of such a valuable cultural tradition surely did not equate with political and economic growth—not in the South, and particularly not in the Delta, which he later dubbed the region out of which the blues emerged:

It is a fortunate thing that along their way the Negro people have created a rich lore of tales, dances, songs, oratorical techniques, ways of praying, recipes, riddles, forms of greeting, lullabies, and a thousand other ways of doing and speaking which give Negro life a special flavor. Why should all this be given up in return for economic betterment? It need not be. The Negro people should be encouraged to be themselves, to develop themselves in their own way as they move along freedom’s road.

But here they must draw upon their own past, as all people have done before them. They must not be ashamed of their forefathers, but proud of them for their courage, the wit and the beauty that they continually expressed, even though they were for a time in bondage…

SNCC, composed as it is of individuals who are unashamed and flexible and unhampered by stuffy middle-class prejudice, must provide the leadership and sponsorship that will nurture this cultural movement.”

Lomax offered an admonishment of the student activists that highlighted the beauty and historical significance of black culture as well as emphasized its power to evoke cohesion and confidence to face the battles ahead. Many people in the audience, however, could not divorce the cogent message from the authoritative visual delivery of Lomax, a white man, in essence, dictating the future of the struggle. Several of the young black activists at Edwards, indeed,

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considered some of the older songs “strange, smacking of slavery and oppression,” in the words of one historian, while others found “Lomax’s remarks patronizing.” 141 The angry young activists had begun to question, or outright reject, white interpretations of the world. To them, by lecturing the burgeoning militants on the effectiveness of mobilization strategies based on older African American traditions, Lomax had solidified the association between white paternalism and folk music, which, in the minds of some, invalidated his message.

The workshop convinced some other homegrown activists, however, of the significance of secular black music in Mississippi. “What I noticed in the Movement was Black people, churches and all that,” Willie Peacock recalled in a later discussion, “had alienated people from their own culture, blues and jazz, everything [and] there was a lot of those people…still around. We knew them guys; we played with them.” 142 Having helped plan and carry out the Sing for Freedom festival in Edwards, Peacock, Sam Block, and Willie McGhee drafted a proposal for a series of “Community Cultural Revival Festivals” in the Delta. To help defray the costs of the events, he applied for a small grant from the “We Shall Overcome” fund, which the Highlander Research and Education Center had recently established with royalties from commercial uses of the song. 143 In total, the amateur folklorists raised an estimated six hundred dollars for the festivals. Though he wanted to fund subsistence salaries, purchase audio and video equipment, and procure the use of an automobile to help recruit talent, Peacock also wanted to “keep the

142 In a group discussion about the aftermath of Selma in 2005, Peacock stated, “And so I found that there was a lot of those people of the era of John Lee Hooker and those kinds of people were still around. We knew them guys, we played with them, and before he passed away I thought he should be showcased. That's basically how the Delta Blues Festival got started”; see, Wazir Peacock, “From Mississippi to Alabama,” Selma & the March to Montgomery: A Discussion, November-June, 2004-2005, http://www.crmvet.org/disc/selma.htm [accessed June 24, 2015].
festival active in the South.” Thus, the producers spent only two hundred dollars on the first Northern Mississippi Folk Festival (NMFF) in Mileston, a community of independent black landowners in Holmes County, over the first weekend in August 1965. The setting for the festival was the Mileston Community Center, which Peacock described as a “grassroots theatre,” a “ramshackle wood building, packed to the rafters with as many people standing outside (looking through windows) and with an inside temperature of around 110 degrees.”

His description of the “grassroots theatre” was very similar to accounts of the rural churches and musical gatherings of black folks in early twentieth century Mississippi, where the sacred and profane were not so rigidly demarcated among some folks. Crediting such places with his unknowing introduction to folklore, Worth Long explained how he used to sneak out of church and listen to the tall tales and detailed accounts of men who drank corn liquor during church. “They would tell these magnificent stories, and they would be singing and doing toasts.” As opposed to interpreting a difference between “saints and sinners,” Long described the exchange as a “secular element in a sacred site.”

COFO established the community center during Freedom Summer to serve as a freedom school as well as a site of mass meetings. Peacock, Block, and McGhee, however, placed an “unofficial ban” on the “freedom songs of today” at the festival, and they emphasized the

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146 William Henry Holtzclaw, founder of the Utica Normal and Industrial Institute for African Americans in Utica, Mississippi, recalled alcohol being sold outside a rural black church in the early 1900s. He decided to organize a music concert in a recently constructed church, “located deep in the forest.” On the evening of the event, so many black folks attended that he feared the building might fall down, as people crowded in and knocked out windows to view the show. Afterwards, Holtzclaw noticed members of the church “buying ‘Blind Tiger’ whisky not fifty yards” from its doors. Largely because of the large crowds and availability of spirits, some rural churches had abandoned evening services altogether. “When a gathering was attempted at night,” Holtzclaw recalled, “it usually resulted in a free-for-all fight, in which revolvers and razors were used indiscriminately, to the injury of some of the congregation and the imprisonment of others”; see, William Henry Holtzclaw, The Black Man’s Burden (New York: The Neale Publishing Company, 1915), 108-109, 184.
significance of the “old blues and spirituals—the freedom songs of the past.” Reflecting the organizing experiences of Worth Long, Peacock explained, “[In] every place we’ve gone, we have found all kinds of talent; we never come away empty-handed. We’ve found singers, joke tellers and dancers, whose stunts run from balling the jack to the twist.” He envisioned a revival of black folk culture as well as hoped to “bring about some appreciation on the part of the Negro himself, of ourselves” and “the richness of [our] past.” The majority of folk artists at the festival, therefore, came out of a search of the mid-Delta over the summer of 1965. The participating musicians, according to one promoter, included black artists, laborers and preachers, cotton-pickers and civil rights workers who, though largely untrained, performed “with the truth and intensity only found in true art forms of the Negro people.”

The first two nights of the festival blended spirituals and the blues and featured ministers such as 80-year-old K.C. Pitts, of Itta Bena, and Reverend Huddie Ledbetter (Not Leadbelly), who played piano and sang gospel. Gospel singer Jake McCraney, of Itta Bena, was a veteran of the movement, having been arrested in Washington D.C. in June 1965 for taking part in a sit-in on behalf of the Freedom Democratic Congressional Challenge. Robert Lee Coleman, of Itta Bena, played the blues on the harmonica, and Greenwood civil rights worker Billy Johnson organized a jazz band devoted strictly to African music. One writer in Ebony described it as “a time of looking backward, but looking backward with pride.”

The festival hoped to bring together three groups: 1) people who remembered “the old times,” 2) young folks who wanted to remember, and 3) white civil rights workers who only

149 MFDP Newsletter 6 (July 28, 1965): 3, MSC Files, SCR ID # 2-36-2-60-3-1-1.
151 Ibid.
recently discovered a “rich and neglected part of American culture.” “African music, games, dances, and food,” as well as a “fashion show of African costumes” also contributed to the folk theme. Hoping to provide an “educational experience for both performers and audience,” the organizers also held impromptu rhythm sessions, which allowed blacks and whites to perform together on such instruments as the bongos, tin cans, pop bottles, and sticks. Blending the old and the new, “Africa and America, the Congo and Mississippi,” and attempting to “recreate the Negro past” through singing, dancing, and eating black-eyed peas and collard greens cooked in huge pots over an open fire, one writer for Ebony argued “the festival was of, by and for the folk.”

The folk revival movement encouraged the development of “nationalistic” pride among African Americans, but SNCC did not consider it a turn towards racial separatism at Mileston. On the contrary, several black participants believed that folk music helped build a “bridge toward a prideful and democratic meeting ground with the white people of the South.” Some optimists even considered such a connection already evident in the fact that whites made up one-third of the seven hundred people who attended the Johns Island, South Carolina festival at Christmas. In addition, one powerful white landowner and his family attended the folk festival at Mileston. Though white folks had a longstanding penchant for visiting black churches and listening to “plantation melodies,” the impact and strength of the black freedom struggle offered new ways of hearing and interpreting the performance of black music, which allowed whites, such as Ruby Bishop, of Knoxville, to escape the physiological constraints of racial discourse. In one account, she explains the revelatory impact of one workshop on folk culture:

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153 Ibid.
154 MFDP Newsletter 6 (July 28, 1965): 3, MSC Files. SCR ID # 2-36-2-60-3-1-1.
156 Ibid.
As soon as I entered the room and looked around, it was obvious which of us were local citizens. We stuck out like sore thumbs with our stiff backs, strained expressions and conventional dress. The program came from persons sitting around on chairs and floor who wore on their faces an openness, a relaxation, an honesty of expression like persons who have removed from their lives the energy-consuming pretenses of our society…Soon I realized that I was angry; shaken to my roots, for whatever potential I ever had for such freedom of expression was largely squeezed out by whatever forces had shaped me. I could readily see why those friends of mine who are constantly working with such people maintain their high morale. They feed their souls through these contacts.\textsuperscript{157}

The Northern Mississippi Folk Festival at Mileston was only the first of several similar festivals that Peacock, Block, and McGhee organized in different parts of the state, all of which served as precursors to the Delta Blues Festival in the late 1970s. In his 1965 report to the “We Shall Overcome” Fund, Peacock expressed his attitude towards folk tradition at Mileston:

Through song and dance a people are able to share their burden, triumph, sadness and gladness of heart. People sing songs of heroism. They sing songs about the common oppressor or exploiter. The smallest and the greatest desires of a people are brought out in folk music. These songs can be used to draw people together and unite them in one common aim, goal, and purpose.\textsuperscript{158}

Long and Peacock, neither of whom participated in SNCC’s Freedom Summer project, articulated the need for blacks to appreciate their own culture rather than uncritically adopt the cultural values of whites. The development of such an “incipient black consciousness” not only contributed to the tensions that eventually split white and black members of SNCC, but also presaged more developed articulations of Black Power.\textsuperscript{159} In his work to continue the festivals,


\textsuperscript{159} Van DeBurg, New Day in Babylon, 50.
for example, Peacock became increasingly aggravated due to funding problems and issues of control, and, after learning about the violent murder of his close friend, he left his home state, moved to California, and joined the Nation of Islam.\textsuperscript{160} The efforts of black activists, scholars, musicians and folklorists to foster a deeper appreciation of the “rich heritage and cultural ties with Black Africa,” nevertheless, proved an important force in the development of black studies programs in higher education.\textsuperscript{161}

Worth Long had aligned himself with SNCC once again in early 1965. In March, he led a group of students from Selma to the steps of the courthouse in Montgomery—the capital city of George Wallace. The police arrested and sent him, along with most student demonstrators, to Kilby Prison, where he slept in a common room with all the other black male demonstrators. Long and other prisoners refused to leave the integrated prison church service on one Sunday, which landed them in solitary confinement for a week. Long’s experiences in southern jails allowed him to view some blues as freedom songs. “You could sing a freedom song that was straight blues,” he explained, “The fact that it happened in jail for your freedom meant that it became sacred in a sense, no matter how you sang it. In jail, people sang a lot of blues, man, a lot of blues. [We] made up songs that I would consider blues.”\textsuperscript{162} The majority of freedom songs, however, were derived from gospels and spirituals. Long poignantly described his time in solitary and subsequent release at the end of the Selma March:

So they took me to the county jail to solitary. I got a vitamin a day, and I got at least one meal and water. A doctor came in to see you once a day. When I got out, the Selma March had just ended, and the rally had happened. The people were


singing ‘We Shall Overcome.’ I was way across the city from where the march was, and you could hear people singing ‘We Shall Overcome.’ It was a great day for me.\footnote{McGehee, ‘‘You Do Not Own What You Cannot Control,’’ 17.}

The singing of freedom songs was certainly “important to the movement,” as Guy and Candy Carawan assert in the introduction to the 1968 edition of *Sing for Freedom*, but “every new chapter of the struggle produced its own songs.” The diverse group of activists, including northern songwriters, who participated in the 1964 Freedom Summer Project produced scores of new songs, and the 1965 Selma March, which ended in the state capitol of Montgomery, offered a powerful display of blacks and whites together singing “We Shall Overcome.” The Carawans considered this moment as a turning point in the movement, declaring it “perhaps the last time that such a scene will be witnessed in this country for some time to come.” The “new mood” of the movement, according to the Carawans, was evident in the growing appreciation of black folk music and the development of new songs, such as Len Chandler’s “Move On Over or We’ll Move on Over You.”\footnote{Guy Carawan and Candie Carawan, eds. *Sing for Freedom: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement Through Its Songs* (Bethlehem, PA: Sing Out Corporation 1990), 103-104.} The song was one rallying cry of the newly-formed Lowndes County, Alabama Freedom Organization (LCFO), an independent black political party boasting the Black Panther emblem. Developing out of the signing of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the LCFO indicated a new thrust in the political education and radical organizing activities of SNCC. Signifying on the movement's religious anchoring and music as well as King's 1963 speech at the Lincoln Memorial, Stokely Carmichael also explained the “new mood” in SNCC as simply: “No more long prayers, no more Freedom songs, no more dreams—let’s go for power.”\footnote{Ibid; Aram Goudsouzian, *Down to the Crossroads: Civil Rights, Black Power, and the Meredith March Against Fear* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2014), 240.}
The philosophical differences of many members shook SNCC to its foundations in 1966, and the upcoming election of officers signaled a shift in its public position. While the organization had certainly become more militant and embraced armed self-defense, it remained loosely tied to the belief that interracial organizing could achieve its goal of an integrated democracy. The May 1966 election, however, marked a turn towards racial separatism and increasingly hostile attitudes against white activists. When the members of SNCC met in Kingston Springs, Tennessee to elect officers, most of them were relaxed and somewhat shell-shocked from their experiences in the South. The relaxed atmosphere of the meeting allowed for the initial re-election of chair John Lewis, who had held the position since 1963.166

Though most folks in attendance believed the election was over, two frustrated black militants—Worth Long, who had a noble service record in SNCC, and Julius Lester, who later joined but was not yet a member—stepped up and, with serious emotion, implored that the election did not bode well for the future of the organization.167 Long asserted that most people voted for Lewis only out of loyalty, not out of their concern for the best interests of SNCC. His words, according to one historian, “hit the group like a collective cold slap in the face.” As his colleagues snapped to attention, Long advised them to ask themselves, “What was SNCC to do in a liberation period? How [was it] to guide the people?” The policies of Lewis, he argued, were incompatible with the new direction of the group. Having already “been in office too long,” Long argued, Lewis and “his ideas no longer represented those of the majority of the organization's members”168 Two elected officers, Ruby Doris Robinson and Cleveland Sellers,
agreed with Long’s concerns and resigned to force another vote. Though Lewis initially refused to resign, the militant contingent in SNCC wore down his supporters after a night of ideological battle, and he finally conceded his long-held post. “Uncertainly, resentment, disillusionment, and divisiveness” permeated the heated debate leading up to the second election, which ushered in the militant, black separatist reign of Stokely Carmichael.169

SNCC wanted to depict the succession as natural, even harmonious. John Lewis, in a later interview, said that he was not bitter about the election. “Stokely and I were symbols about the sense of direction,” he explained, “whether we would move away from the concept of integration or keep to the philosophy of nonviolent change. I didn’t take it personally.”170 He realized that change was bound to come in an organization that did not have a top down structure. John Lewis and James Forman were at the press conference announcing the regime change in hopes of avoiding “any interpretation of…a split in the organization,” and a press release depicted SNCC’s new all-black organizing policy as a practical move that had been in the works for a while. The mainstream press, however, remained unconvinced and reported that Lewis had been “ousted” by “leaders who appear eager to drop whites from their organization,” “militants” who advocated “third party politics for Southern Negroes;” and “extreme black racists” who turned “SNCC policy toward racial separatism.”171

The suspicions about SNCC seemed true the following month when Stokely Carmichael attracted international media attention by rejecting the phrase “Freedom Now” and issuing his clarion call for “Black Power” outside of Greenwood, Mississippi. In an attempt to revive

169 Fleming, Soon We Will Not Cry, 160-161.
SNCC’s remaining projects, the frustrated, intellectual new director and former student of influential Howard University professor Sterling Brown, had been touring Mississippi with Cleveland Sellers and Stanley Wise when James Meredith was shot not long after beginning his solitary March against Fear. The three young activists rushed to the hospital bed of Meredith, as did SCLC leader Martin Luther King Jr., NAACP executive director Roy Wilkins, and National Urban League director Whitney Young, all of whom came together for an impromptu meeting in which they vowed not to give in the fear.172 Carmichael believed it an opportunity for SNCC to ensure that African Americans maintained control of the Mississippi movement and get “people relating to the concept of Black Power” through the development of strong, autonomous community organizations.173 Wilkins and Young, both acutely aware and disapproving of the militant attitudes swelling within SNCC, aborted the mission and distanced themselves from Carmichael, who, at a political rally following his arrest and subsequent release upon entering the city of Greenwood, introduced local people and the rest of America to the concept of black power. John Lewis immediately resigned from the organization amidst widespread speculation as to its exact meaning and denounced the turn towards racial separatism.174 While historian Clayborne Carson considered SNCC’s embrace of black power a retreat from its more effective, earlier organizing strategy, the identity politics that developed out of the different stages of black consciousness proved an appropriate and healthy response to the deeply-engrained racial discourse of white supremacy, which had stripped so many blacks of a confident sense of self-worth and remained prevalent in the minds and institutions at the core of American society.175

172 Goudsouzian, Down to the Crossroads, 240.
The “new mood” of the black freedom struggle radiated well through the song “Burn Baby Burn.” Arkansas native Jimmy Collier composed the frustrated anthem in the wake of the Watts riots, while he campaigned with SCLC to “End the Slums” in Chicago. David Llorens, in his 1966 article “New Birth in the Ghetto,” noted the decline of movement activity in the South and the rise of anti-poverty struggles in northern cities, particularly the “End the Slums” campaign, and he examines the work of Collier in social context. In the second line of “Burn, Baby, Burn,” Collier expresses his lack of faith in the civil rights movement to effect any lasting change in his daily life.

I heard people talking about a dream, now, a dream
I couldn’t catch,
I really wanted to be somebody and all I had was
a match.
Couldn’t get oil from Rockefellers’ wells
Couldn’t get diamonds from the mine
If I can’t enjoy the American Dream, won’t be water
but fire next time,
So I said burn, baby, burn,
Burn, baby, burn,
Nowhere to be,
No one to see,
Nowhere to turn,
Burn, baby, burn

The “new mood” of Jimmy Collier reflected the increasingly disturbing belief among African Americans that reform and reconciliation were impossible to achieve in America. In the light of increasing civil unrest in poverty-stricken urban communities, many civil rights activists had

176 In 1968, Collier also composed “Rent Strike Blues,” which described the abhorrent conditions and lack of maintenance in urban ghettos; see, Guy Carawan and Candie Carawan, eds. Sing for Freedom: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement Through Its Songs (Sing Out Corporation 1990), 232.
179 Ibid.
become conscious of the deceptive benefits of individualism and hard work, the principles which butressed the “American Dream.” Once again, as with Carmichael's statement, Collier is clearly invoking King’s “I Have a Dream” speech as well as the 1963 James Baldwin book *The Fire Next Time*.\(^{180}\)

Though SNCC organizers initially worked to organize voter registration drives and political education workshops with established local leaders, the “new mood” impelled some of them to address economic problems, such as underemployment and job discrimination. Having been central to the election of Stokely Carmichael, who represented the “new mood” of the organization, Worth Long made a serious commitment to the economic empowerment of black communities. He spent most of his time in 1966 organizing in Arkansas and Georgia. In Little Rock, for example, he helped establish the Black United Youth (BUY), “a more militant than SNCC organization” that demanded equal hiring practices and employment opportunities for African Americans at stores both inside and outside of the black community.\(^{181}\) The group’s slogan reflected the “new mood” of SNCC in declaring: “you can buy, or you can build, or you can burn.” BUY picketed in front of Safeway Supermarkets in Little Rock to protest discrimination in its hiring practices.\(^ {182}\) The organization also demanded hiring concessions from the city government, and, after experiencing racial discrimination on the police force, BUY organized a program called CopWatch and announced its plans to organize “Negro patrols” to follow the police in the black communities of the city.\(^ {183}\)

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\(^{182}\) “Supermart Picketed,” *Northwest* (Fayetteville) *Arkansas Times*, May 18, 1968, p.12.

Even though he did not receive as much funding from SNCC as he had in the past, Long remained committed to passing on what he had learned during the struggles for civil rights. It did not matter so much the focus of the organization, or the righteous direction in which young people were moving. Due to his earlier activism in the city, one fraternal organization let him setup rent free in a building next to their lodge. He needed a place to stay and a way to make some money to survive. Thus, he organized a bookstore at that location, right off the campus in Little Rock, which he hoped to turn into a hub of information. He drove to New York, where he could get books for a quarter a piece or fifty cents, and he piled all of them in his Volkswagen van, drove back to Arkansas, and stocked the shelves. If the book had cost a quarter, he’d sell it for a dollar, and he had dollar sales with no book more than a dollar. “We selected books based on their political or cultural or social content,” Long explained, “mostly history books or…books that they [the black community] would not ordinarily have access to or buy.” He bought books written by Vietnamese authors that discussed anti-colonialism under French rule, one in particular which Long referred to as “the book of logic.” Any confrontation, he reasoned, with a colonial power offered important lessons in battlefield tactics.\footnote{184} Long drove to New York to get a bolt of cloth so he could sell Dashikis inside in the book store.

The institutional building of SNCC also intersected with its cultural work, which Maria Varela called “culturally sustainable economic development.” In 1967, Worth Long lived close to Vine City in a shotgun house, only two blocks from the old Atlanta SNCC office. In 1966, Ruth Howard and Mindy Samstein had opened a neighborhood hangout next door to Abernathy’s Church called the Lovin’ Spoonful. Worth Long and Julius Lester agreed to keep it open during the summer of 1967 because most of the students would be gone for the summer.

\footnote{184} Long and Varela, discussion.
Sometimes poets and musical groups played on the weekends at Pascal’s Carousel, and after the show they performed at the Lovin’ Spoonful, which was a block away. Several leaders of the Black Arts Movement, such as Amiri Baraka, Bernice Reagon, and the Harambee Singers visited The Lovin’ Spoonful while it was under Long’s supervision. The whole scene had an open, inviting feeling about it that allowed him to express himself in verse. He also recited:

Sterling Brown’s poetry and some other stuff. Stokely came by there all the time because it’s a watering hole. And it’s always open. I don’t think we had a lock for the key. We did not lock the place. You go up the stairs over Alex’s Barbeque. Now Alex’s Barbeque would be locked. But at that time there was no danger because someone was always sleeping behind or on the counter…. There was always basically someone there. But I don’t think we locked the door when we left. There was nothing to steal. That concept was very important for that particular time because people were--it provided a venue at which you could express yourself. Creatively express yourself. You weren’t just singing to the choir. 185

One of Long’s poems reveals his militant black consciousness perhaps better than anything else. The civic ideals of the nation, to which the movement sought access, seemed hollow and empty in the face of an unsympathetic white majority’s tacit support of racial violence, which impelled Worth Long to revisit the theme of “Burn Baby Burn” in his 1967 poem “Arson and Cold Lace (or how I yearn to Burn Baby Burn).” First appearing in the 1967 Umbra Anthology, the poem considers urban rebellions as not only the beginnings of a revolution, but also as retribution for a long history of oppression. Employing alliteration and consonance to emphasize his mounting frustration, Long reveals the unforgettable discovery of the hypocritical civic foundations of “false-faced America.” He is not down or sad; he may have the blues, but he is certainly angry. He repeats certain words and phrases, such as “false-faced farmers” and “we have found you out,” to focus on the unremitting consternation of blacks

185 Ibid.
regarding their continued and almost incomprehensibly complex state of oppression. At his most militant moment, Long envisions urban rebellion as retribution for the transgressions of white society—the “flames must devour…and torture the masters.”

We have found you out, false-faced Americans, we have found you out.
We have found you out, false-faced farmers, we have found you out.
The sparks of suspicion are melting your waters
And waters can’t drown them, the fires are burning
And firemen can’t calm them with falsely appeasing
And preachers can’t pray with hopes for deceiving
Nor leaders deliver a lecture on losing
Nor teachers inform them the chosen are choosing
For now is the fire and fires won’t answer
To logical reason and hopefully seeming
Hot flames must devour the kneeling and feeling
And torture the masters whose idiot pleading
Get lost in the echoes of dancing and bleeding.
We have found you out, false-faced farmers, we have found you out.
We have found you out, false-faced America, we have found you out.\(^{186}\)

The disillusionment of black activists, such as Collier and Long, as well as the abandonment of tactical nonviolence, coincided with a growing interest in racial identity and led several veteran activists to embrace theories of cultural nationalism and racial separatism in their quest for black power. Historian Peniel Joseph describes black power as a “militant new race consciousness that placed black identity as the soul of a new radicalism.”\(^{187}\) It was, in essence, a form of radicalism divorced from white control, which emerged from the realization that substantial political and cultural changes could only result from blacks organizing inside black communities. The decisions of black activists to adopt cultural pluralism over cultural


nationalism or focus on political as opposed to economic issues was of little consequence, because all of the black power advocates realized that their newfound sense of self rested largely on inherited cultural definitions and racial stereotypes. In *New Day in Babylon*, historian William L. Van Deburg explains the impetus of the appropriate turn inwards:

Blacks needed to develop a new appreciation of their past—a rich historical pageant that had been obscured by Hollywood images of cannibalistic savages and shuffling, comic stooges. They needed to write their own histories and create their own myths and legends. Through the process of self-discovery and self-legitimization, the Afro-American people would develop a group consciousness and pride that would serve them well in the struggle for power.188

The fervent call for the development of black consciousness that arose from this process served as “adhesive” as well as a “guiding force” for a host of frustrated black radicals, anarchists, artists, and even a few folklorists in the 1970s.189 Though the fiery verses of “Burn, Baby, Burn” reflected the anger and revolutionary posture of the Black Power Movement, Jimmy Collier also embedded a message of hope in the song, forecasting a new emphasis on the development of strong organizations and the appreciation of black culture. “Learn baby, learn,” he shouted, “you need a concern…you’ve got money to earn [and] You’ve got midnight oil to burn baby, burn.”190

In the late 1960s, Worth Long used the “folk wisdom” attained during his organizing campaigns in southern black communities to overcome his feelings of anger and helplessness. Unlike other radicals in SNCC, who pursued goals of retribution and violent revolution when faced with state-sanctioned assassinations, he engaged in an extensive and inexorable campaign to expose the racial stereotypes and falsehoods about black history and culture that pervaded American society.

188 Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon*, 27.
189 Ibid.
“Community means mutual cooperation of individuals who respect each other and have sufficient consensus to make cooperative endeavor possible. To gain this in a society where there have been such profound differences means you must work hard at developing the competence of those who have been deprived. *A façade of biracialism in substance still preserves the dominant-subordinate relationship.*”

John Mudd
Former Director of the Child’s Development Group of Mississippi (CDGM)
Founding Board member of the Mississippi Action for Community Education (MACE)

By the time Stokely Carmichael introduced the term “black power” in a speech outside Greenwood in June 1966, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) had almost no presence in the state of Mississippi. As Unita Blackwell explained, only the “home-grown agitators were left to carry on.” In late 1966 or early 1967, she hammered out the foundations of a community action organization in a conversation with Fannie Lou Hamer and Amzie Moore, all of whom believed, “We got to keep our people moving. We can’t stop and rest now.” Blackwell wanted to take the struggle to the next level, “from standing up to the power structure to breaking it down.” Amzie Moore realized they had to keep getting “people registered and to the polls, and we need to get people in office, now.” As Blackwell asserted in her memoir:

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193 Ibid.
We agreed that we had to find a way to keep teaching our people about government and how they can work within government to make their lives better—all our lives better. We wanted to keep pushing voter registration and participation in our government. We discussed the need to teach others about local government: what the city council, the board of supervisors, and the justice of the peace do. We had to train our people to organize and provide leadership. We’ve come so far, we said. We don’t want to fall back. We want to build on our progress. What we needed to do was bigger than all of us. We had to help our people help themselves.194

She realized that the federal government would not fund the revolution. With a vision of self-determination as well as the support of friends in Holmes and Madison County, who also wanted to continue organizing on the political level, the three Delta natives embraced a new type of organization to educate and encourage action in the black community, and they adopted the name of a revolutionary program being used to break down the state’s old order. The Mississippi Action for Community Education (MACE) was the name of the project under which civil rights activists had operated the Child Development Group of Mississippi (CDGM).195 “We had our name,” Blackwell recalled, “and we had our mission.”196

To avoid the types of political attacks that sank the CDGM, their first decision was to solicit financial support from private sources rather than the federal government. Blackwell, therefore, “got in touch with Ed Brown,” a former Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee project director and Freedom Democratic Party organizer who had moved to Washington D.C. to work with the Citizens’ Crusade Against Poverty (CCAP), and she asked him to come back and serve as the first director of MACE.197 Having worked very hard to secure federal funding on behalf of CDGM, Brown possessed a desire to return and finish the work that SNCC, in his

194 Ibid.
195 Sanders, A Chance for Change, 44.
196 Blackwell and Morris, Barefootin’, 166-169.
197 Ibid.
opinion, had initiated and left undone in Mississippi. The forward thinking and intelligent community organizer had already developed a proposal for the establishment of a CCAP training program in Greenville. Standing six feet, three inches tall and weighing just over two hundred pounds, with “bushy hair,” a mustache, and gold-frame glasses, Ed Brown accepted the honor of being the first director at MACE. The presence of his conspicuous, yellow 1967 Mustang marked a new beginning for the black freedom struggle in the Delta. Though initially imagined as a temporary program to help grassroots organizers make the transition from protest marches to stable and functioning community-based action groups, MACE would become one of the most durable, robust organizations in the Delta. It also later became the first organization to demonstrate the economic and social incentives of blues tourism to Mississippians.

Ed Brown’s tenure as the director of MACE was important for establishing its deep organizational roots in the black communities of the Delta, and he also proved crucial to the development agenda embedded in the rural, organizational culture of the various county affiliates of MACE. The working-class consciousness, or what historian Clyde Woods called “the blues epistemology” of most African-Americans in the region provided the analytic force required to evaluate the needs of black communities and reconceptualize what kinds projects were possible in the Delta. Brown established the social, economic, and political foundations of MACE, and even though he vacated his position after five years, he also served as a living example of the how deeply marked some African Americans were by the blues in the South.

Born on August 19, 1941 to Thelma Warren and Eddie Charles Brown, Sr., in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Edward Charles Brown Jr. came of age in a unique city that informed and

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198 CDGM, Jan 9, 1967, MSC Files, SCR ID # 6-45-4-95-1-1-1.
inspired the growing civil rights movement after World War II. In 1953, for example, Baptist minister T.J. Jemison developed and deployed the effective model for a bus boycott that Martin Luther King Jr. and the Montgomery Improvement Association employed so publicly in 1955. Having carefully trained at Jemison’s church, several students at historically black Southern University also made some attempts to desegregate eating establishments in the downtown areas in the late 1950s. The Baptist preacher continued training students into the 1960s, and after students at North Carolina A&T launched the Greensboro sit-ins on the first day of February, he organized a group of students at Southern, including Ed Brown, to stage similar demonstrations in Baton Rouge. According to his younger brother H. Rap Brown (b. October 4, 1943 as Hubert Gerold Brown, but later known as Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin), the militant attitudes of the students germinated in the shadow of Louisiana State University, a “big fine school with modern buildings” that was off-limits to African Americans. Southern University, a poorly funded school almost on the brink of collapse and in desperate need of maintenance, was reserved for blacks. Upon analysis of the two divergent images, Rap noticed a clear and unambiguous message being sent by whites: “Ni--er, you ain’t shit. Die Ni--er Die!”

In mid-March, the Louisiana Board of Education suggested college presidents take stern disciplinary actions against students involved in incidents that would discredit the institution or the educational system. As a result, Southern University refused to tolerate student protests and dealt out punishment with a heavy hand. Ed Brown and fifteen of his fellow students, having been inspired to action, were among those arrested for “disturbing the peace” after participating in one of three sit-ins at a restaurant, a drugstore, and the Greyhound Bus Station in late

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March. Upon learning of the arrests, three thousand students marched through downtown to the state capital buildings and held a prayer vigil in support of the students. The president of the university expelled all of the demonstrators, including Brown and the leader of the march. Though the 1960 student sit-ins ultimately failed in Baton Rouge, with about a thousand students dropping out of Southern University, the NAACP fought the “disturbing the peace” charges all the way to the Supreme Court. In the important 1961 Garner v. Louisiana decision, the court ruled that the students’ “peaceful and orderly conduct” demonstrated their incapability of disturbing the peace, overturned the convictions, and concluded that “discriminatory practices enforced by state law constituted denials of equal protection.”

Brown’s father, meanwhile, was unamused with his expulsion. If his son did not attend college, he had to go to work, and his father got him a job in the oil industry. After laboring in an oil refinery, Ed Brown found jobs on oil rigs and building bridges over swamps around Baton Rouge, but he soon grew tired of manual labor. The State Board of Education had, in addition to expulsion, banned most of the radical students from attending any state-sponsored university in Louisiana. The ban ultimately proved a fortuitous punishment, because it led to his life-changing enrollment at historically-black Howard University in Washington D.C. The situation reflected the story of Bre’r Rabbit, who exclaimed, “Oh, please, Bre’r Bear, please don’t throw me in that briar patch.” Ed Brown would hit the ground running in the nation’s capital.

206 Steve Visser and Lateef Mungin, “Brown Again at Bat for his Younger Brother,” ATL, Jan 20, 2002, 3C.
A host of important black writers—most with radical pasts—worked as professors at the black southern colleges and universities during the early 1960s. While some of these black intellectuals, such as Robert Hayden, had moved far away from the earlier politics of the old Left, several of them maintained their earlier commitments to the Left. The older, more radical writers, such as Margaret Walker at Jackson State University and Sterling Brown at Howard University, believed it was one of their missions to mentor young black writers and political activists and teach them the significance of their ancestors hidden transcripts, particularly those associated with the Popular Front. John O. Killens and other important black poets, most notably Hayden and Arna Bontemps, figured prominently in initiating writers’ conferences at HBCU’s that helped create an intellectual environment for the emergence of the Black Arts Movement.²⁰⁸

Howard University—dependent on federal funding and with an administration most hostile to radicalism and revolutionary thought—was a beacon for the black bourgeoisie. The official aspirations of students included respectability, professionalism and material success. Political agitation and black folk culture did not enjoy any particular influence.²⁰⁹ Yet, the HBCU boasted a notable history of civil rights activism among its students as well as professors. In the 1940s, the students launched campaigns against segregation in public facilities using such tactics such as sitting-in at lunch counters. Given the inevitable student turnover and the general disinterest in publicly acknowledging its militant student history, the radical members of the faculty served as unofficial historians. E. Franklin Frazier, an historian who had been associated


²⁰⁹ Most of the students embraced the same sort of middle-class values as the students at Fort Valley College in Georgia, the site of the annual Fort Valley Rural Folk Festival, which began in 1940. It remained an annual event until the mid-1950s, when, according to blues historian Bruce Bastin, students so ridiculed the folk artists that many of them refused to return; see, Bruce Bastin, Red River Blues: The Blues Tradition in the Southeast (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 82; see also, Peniel Joseph, “Dashikis and Democracy: Black Studies, Student Activism, and the Black Power Movement,” Journal of African American History 88:2 (Spring 2003): 182-203.
with Howard since the mid-1930s, and Sterling Brown, professor of African American literature and folklore, revealed the considerable history of black activism and radical thought at Howard to members of the Non-Violent Action Group (NAG), an affiliate of SNCC during the early 1960s.210 While no chapter of SNCC ever developed at Howard, local activists established a chapter in the nation’s capital, and it consisted of several students of the HBCU, including Mike Thelwell, Stokely Carmichael, Cleveland Sellers, Ed Brown, Charlie Cobb, and Courtland Cox, all of whom played key roles in SNCC and the emergence of Black Power.

Sterling Brown was the most unique radicalizing influence at Howard University. Even though one former student recalled that his formal classes were competent and routine, similar to more or less standard literature courses of the day, it was not unheard of for Brown’s class to feature surprise guests such as jazz pianist Willie “The Lion” Smith. The professor’s unofficial seminars on black history, music, literature, and politics, however, which often featured bourbon, left a noticeable imprint on several participants of both the Black Power Movement and Black Arts Movement, including Amiri Baraka, A.B. Spellman, Toni Morrison, and Mike Thelwell. Extending his sphere of influence beyond the members of NAG, Brown also served as a mentor to the largely avant-gardist group of writers associated with the student journal *Dasein.*211 The *Dasein* writers did not get involved with the political activities of NAG, the leaders of which considered the poets to be mere “bohemians…too concerned with their images as artists.” The existence of both groups, however, demonstrates the influence of Sterling Brown, who, along with other professors like E. Franklin Frazier, helped promulgate a dynamic political and cultural

210 Brown also revealed the administrative roadblocks encountered by previous radicals, which was similar to the resistance encountered by NAG; see, James Smethurst, “The Black Arts Movement and Historically Black Colleges and Universities,” in *New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement*, eds. Lisa Gail Collins and Margo Natalie Crawford (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 81.
211 The writing group for the student journal included Percy Johnston, Oswald Govan, Walter De Legall, and Leroy Stone.
environment on campus. Neither NAG nor *Dasein* ever received official recognition from Howard University, a fact which underscores the contradictions of political and cultural life on black college campuses in the 1960s.

Sterling Brown was one of the first scholars who understood the importance of studying folk and oral traditions as forms of social resistance in black communities. His “pre-occupation with folk culture,” according to colleague Lewis W. Jones, “led him to search out the local folk artists, whom he paid to come to his house on Saturday nights to play for a small coterie.” After conducting a host of interviews with former students, Hollie West revealed that “visitors to Brown’s home were as likely to find him playing host to Leadbelly as Ralph Bunche.” The home of Sterling Brown was the nucleus of his academic community, and it ensured a dynamic style of cultural education. The professor had fostered an appreciation of black history and folk culture among many of his notable students, such as Kwame Nkrumah, Ossie Davis, Larry Neal, Ralph Ellison, Amiri Baraka, and Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael), the last of whom explicitly credited the professor with showing him how to “really appreciate and love our people’s culture.”

Of all the activists nurtured under his wing, fellow student Michael Thelwell maintained that Ed Brown was “perhaps the most closely attuned…to his style and persona” and clearly his “main man.” Soon after arriving at Howard, Ed Brown made a connection with Sterling Brown, who recognized the southern refugee’s strained financial circumstances and, “intrigued by his southern sensibility,” offered him an informal work study. It was not long before both

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214 Ibid.
216 Ibid.
professor and student started to address each other as “Cuz” Brown, and, along with other members of NAG, drinking “some liquor” and telling “some lies.” The scholar of black folk material recognized the “deep blues voice” of Ed Brown, who also turned out to be a “veritable virtuoso of southern black culture” who “delighted in singing the raunchy blues, prison work songs, preaching song sermons and exhibiting a truly impressive repertoire of folk aphorisms.”

Regarding him as “one of the most skillful and versatile exponents” of the song-sermon, a lyrical style which he believed one of the only major original poetic contributions that developed in America, Michael Thelwell believed that Brown’s passionate familiarity with black folk material allowed him to develop such “virtuosity” and command of a “seemingly inexhaustible repertoire.”

Brown also possessed considerable talent as an organizer, which developed under the tutelage of Bayard Rustin. Indeed, it took him little to no time before rising as one of the leaders of the NAG, which boasted quite an impressive civil rights resume. The young members of NAG developed as activists through the important relationships its members established with leaders such as Bayard Rustin, a longtime civil rights strategist, homosexual and former staffer for Socialist Party candidate Norman Thomas, who maintained ties with the emerging generation of activists. By nurturing and extending his relationships with emerging leaders such as Carmichael and Brown, the elder Rustin managed to make a deep imprint on the movement while remaining in the background. Ed Brown, in hindsight, asserted that Rustin “had a very, very decisive influence on me and I think the rest of us for a long time.”

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217 Ibid.
Rustin was the chief organizer of the 1963 March on Washington, and he recruited Brown and other members of NAG to serve as volunteers.\(^\text{\textsuperscript{220}}\) The non-violent direct action campaigns of NAG included demonstrations at the White House in support of student sit-ins and at bus stations in support of the Freedom Riders. Brown and Carmichael recruited as many as 350 Howard students to participate in demonstrations, including the young Courtland Cox, who attended a NAG meeting and met the enigmatic Ed Brown.\(^\text{\textsuperscript{221}}\)

Often seen wearing an African robe, tennis shoes and dark sunglasses at Howard, Brown sharpened his skills in the highly confrontational desegregation campaign in Cambridge, Maryland, where Howard graduate Gloria Richardson had emerged as a leader by establishing a local branch of NAG, promoting black pride, and taking a more militant stance than most civil rights groups at the time.\(^\text{\textsuperscript{222}}\) It was the crucial training of Richardson that matured Howard students, who played major roles in the boycotts, sit-ins and rallies to desegregate the Eastern Shore of Maryland.\(^\text{\textsuperscript{223}}\) After several African delegates to the United Nations were refused service at businesses on the main route between New York and Washington D.C., the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) and NAG initiated and sustained a high-profile campaign along U.S. Highway 40 for over 18 months.\(^\text{\textsuperscript{224}}\) The demonstrations met with strong opposition from local police and angry whites and soon turned violent. Instead of adhering to non-violence and “turning the other cheek,” some protestors chose to retaliate against the police, which led to

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\(^{\text{\textsuperscript{220}}}\) Cleveland Sellers, interview by Gloria Clark, September 2, 2003, Holly Springs, Mississippi, the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi.


\(^{\text{\textsuperscript{223}}}\) Steve Visser and Lateef Mungin, “Brown Again a t Bat for his Younger Brother,” ATL, Jan 20, 2002, 3C.

several arrests. The subsequent outbreak of civil unrest featured the brandishing of pistols and the destruction of several white-owned businesses, which impelled the governor to declare martial law. “It was quite an embarrassment to the United States,” NAG member Courtland Cox recalled, which the Soviet Union used as a weapon in the Cold War.225

The leaders of NAG were also some of the best students at Howard University. Caught up in the current of the movement, however, members such as Brown and Carmichael found little time to engage with formal collegiate studies. The appeal of mastering the skills taught in the college classroom faded away soon enough anyway after filtered through the reasoning and rhetoric of movement leaders, whose lessons fomented a sense of skepticism about the celebratory histories of the United States.

And we did not ask why segregation and discrimination is happening to the black community, we kept asking ourselves why not change the circumstances of segregation and what was the best way of going about it. We were certainly in a hurry to change the world. We felt that the world according to segregation had lasted long enough and we needed to have a world that allowed the African American community to develop and reach its full potential.

After participating in the March, the members of NAG enjoyed a feeling of euphoria for the next few weeks. It lasted until the morning of September 15, when a bomb exploded at Birmingham’s Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, killing four young black girls and injuring over twenty other people. Their sense of elation soon evaporated, as Cleveland Sellers explained, and the members of NAG “began to talk more about…making larger commitments, and making choices about whether or not we needed to be in college, or whether or not we needed to be in the field working.”226

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225 Cleveland Sellers, interview by Gloria Clark, September 2, 2003, Holly Springs, Mississippi, the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi.
226 Ibid.
The motivating force on this issue came from their mentor and from a bit farther back in the African American past. Sterling Brown, indeed, served as much more than the professor who introduced black radicals to the elements of resistance in black folklore, and who instructed the young leaders of the black freedom struggle about the history of black resistance at Howard. He was also a salient influence on his student’s decision to leave the safe confines of campus to obtain a real-world education through experience in the field. It was his own travels down South, in fact, that led him to encourage his students to leave the classroom in the early 1960s. Though the visionary writers that converged in Harlem during its Jazz Age Renaissance were certainly among his literary influences, Sterling Brown also received much inspiration from the American poetic traditions of Robert Frost, Carl Sandburg, and Edwin Arlington Robinson. They offered legitimate archetypes for creative writing that combined democratic values and vernacular language. Brown—like them—found his creative and intellectual stimulus in regional idioms and vernacular culture.²²⁷ The new American poetic traditions were crucial to cultivating an awareness of the poetic, political, and philosophical potential of African American folklore and language.

By setting out as a student on “folklore collecting trips,” which included stops at vernacular archives such as noisy barbershops, isolated tenant farms, and raucous juke joints, he experienced and absorbed a cultural aesthetic that marked his life’s work and left an indelible imprint on nearly all students who came in contact with him.²²⁸ In one account, Brown

²²⁸ Funded by a Rosenwald Fellowship, he traveled around the Black Belt collecting black speech in recorded interviews and noted black perspectives in his notebooks, most of which ended up in a book called *A Negro Looks at the South*. 
emphasized that his academic training was as crucial to his analysis as his engagement with the Harlem Renaissance:

These men taught me to think. At Harvard, I went into careful study of American poetry. I learned from Edwin Arlington Robinson’s _Tilbury Town_, where he took up the undistinguished, the failures, and showed the extraordinary in ordinary lives…I learned from Claude McKay [and] participated in what I called the New Negro Renaissance. I wrote poetry. I went South…I learned the strength of my people. I learned the fortitude. I learned the humor. I learned the tragedy. I learned from a wandering guitar player [Calvin ‘Big Boy’ Davis] about John Henry, about Stagolee, about ‘The Ballad of the Bollweevil.’ I learned folktales. I learned folkstuff. I was like a sponge. I had a good eye. I had a good ear [and] I had a good mind…

Sterling Brown advised the members of NAG to leave the “university and go in the world and get an education.” Believing that the best place at that time to get an education was Mississippi, Ed Brown decided to leave Howard in the spring of 1964. He headed straight for Jackson, Mississippi and reported to the Lynch Street office of the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), a statewide coalition of civil rights groups including CORE, the SCLC, and the NAACP, but dominated by SNCC. After the disappearance of fellow activists James Cheney, Andrew Goodman, and Micky Schwerner in June, Ed Brown led a group of COFO workers to protest in the Neshoba County seat of Philadelphia, where, under the brightly lit marquee of the Delaney Street Theatre, they carried placards that decried the justice system in Mississippi. The group started singing “We Shall Overcome” and marched around the federal building as the lights of camera crews shone brightly. After a while, Ed Brown broke away from the pack and mounted the courthouse steps to shout: “The moral responsibility lies with

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American society.” Indeed, it did; the outrage over the activists’ deaths helped secure the passage of the Civil Rights Act, which President Lyndon Johnson signed on July 2, 1964.

President Johnson used indirect threats of political reprisal to force the reluctant J. Edgar Hoover to launch an investigation, during which navy divers and FBI agents uncovered the bodies of several other black Mississippians, who had recently disappeared but not attracted attention outside their local communities. Neshoba County did not have a monopoly on white supremacist violence. The white residents of Tallahatchie County were also vigilant in their maintenance of Jim Crow. In June 1964, the harassment of local whites had forced the retreat of COFO activist Margaret Block—the sister of Sam Block—who had laid the groundwork for the local movement while staying on the farm of 89-year old Janie Brewer, the matriarch of a landowning family that supported the voter registration effort. COFO district coordinator Stokely Carmichael, in response, sent Ed Brown, Gwen Gilliam, Tina Lawrence, and Len Edwards to Swan Lake in Tallahatchie County, where fellow Howard classmate Fred Mangrum took over as project director.

According to the 1960 census, 8,580 whites and 15,400 blacks lived in Tallahatchie County, but not a single African American was registered to vote. The lynching of Emmett Till had invoked fear among black residents, and it also inspired the readiness of the COFO workers coming into the county. Brown recalled the dangerous atmosphere in Swan Lake. In spite of terrorism and harassment, the Brewer family and the COFO staff members engaged in a confrontational voter registration campaign that drew increasing attention from Sheriff E. R.

232 The victims included college students Henry Hezekiah Dee and Charles Eddie Moore, who were found to have been kidnapped, beaten and killed by whites, as well as 14-year-old Herbert Oarsby and five other unidentified blacks.
Dogan. Less than a week after the FBI dug the bodies of Cheney, Schwerner, and Goodman out of that earthen dam in Neshoba County, the sheriff, along with three truckloads of local whites, tried to attack the Brewer farm on the evening of August 11. The representatives of COFO learned of the impending raid, however, and concealed themselves, with firearms, around the farm. Janie Brewer remained in the house preparing Molotov cocktails in anticipation of the attack, and Ed Brown stood on the perimeter armed with a 30.06 caliber rifle. Project director Fred Mangrum walked out to the sheriff and his night riders to inform them of their disadvantage in case of a firefight. His bold actions proved instrumental in preventing a shootout, according to Brown. Mangrum suggested that the uninvited guests vacate the premises, and the sheriff ordered his team to leave and nightriders never returned to the Brewer farm.\(^\text{234}\)

Having participated in one of the most effective displays of armed resistance during Freedom Summer, Brown decided to travel to the Democratic national convention in New Jersey with the recently-organized Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), a racially-integrated political party that hoped to unseat the regular, all-white delegates from Mississippi. Since the all-white delegation was elected in violation of the party’s rules, as blacks had been systematically excluded from voting in the primaries, the MFDP challenged the seating of regulars and sought recognition from the national party. The delegates of the MFDP, after all, had each been elected earlier that month in strict compliance with party rules.\(^\text{235}\) In New Jersey, the delegates presented their arguments in support of the challenge to the Convention Credentials Committee, which televised its proceedings, allowing the nation to see and hear the powerful testimony of black Mississippian such as Fannie Lou Hamer, a sharecropper from Sunflower

\(^{234}\) Umoja, *We Will Shoot Back*, 110-111.
\(^{235}\) The MFDP delegates who travelled to New Jersey included Lawrence Guyot, Peggy J. Conner, Victoria Gray, Edwin King, Aaron Henry, Fannie Lou Hamer, Annie Devine, and Robert Parris Moses.
County who provided a vivid description of apartheid in the Mississippi Delta. Brown and the rest of the MFDP’s large group of supporters also garnered considerable publicity for setting up a non-stop picket line just outside the convention on the boardwalk. Though the liberal leaders of the party supported an even split of the seats between the two delegations, Johnson opposed the solution, because he feared that rejecting the regular Democrats of Mississippi would lose him political support in the South. Liberal Democrats Hubert Humphrey and Walter Reuther, president of the United Auto Workers union, eventually worked out a compromise with black civil rights leaders such as Roy Wilkins and Bayard Rustin. Johnson agreed to choose two of the sixty-eight MFDP delegates to serve as at-large delegates, but the remaining delegates would have to settle for being non-voting guests of the convention. Since the “compromise” permitted the regulars to keep their seats, the MFDP refused to accept it and left the convention. “We didn’t come all this way for no two seats,” Hamer declared, “cause all of us is tired.”

The drama of Atlantic City had drained the enthusiasm of the MFDP delegates and staff, all of whom seemed apprehensive about what awaited them upon their return to Mississippi. With all the Freedom Summer volunteers gone home and the national press corps too, some folks wondered if white supremacists might take advantage of their absence and seek vengeance. Even filled up with anxiety, the MFDP contingent beamed with pride about their defiant challenge to the lily white regulars. No, they were not seated, but the challenge did force the president and the nation to acknowledge the problem. The failure of their challenge, in addition, elicited national outrage, which helped initiate the push for the 1965 Voting Rights Act and ensured that all future Democratic conventions featured racially-integrated delegations. The

238 Kay Mills, This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer (New York: Plume, 1994), 5.
MFDP had made the initial dramatic thrust, which, though tiresome, inspired them to return to Mississippi and “commence abuilding up the party,” as Stokely Carmichael put it; we got to “keep on keepin’ on.”

To draw down from the sheer scale of Freedom Summer, the SNCC office in Mississippi had to regroup and develop a sustainable program based on local resources. Stokely Carmichael and several of his comrades from NAG—Ed Brown, Courtland Cox, Ralph Featherstone, Ruth Howard, and Muriel Tillinghast—realized there was some momentum on the grassroots level and stayed on to build it up. A lot of other folks in SNCC, however, suffered from what psychiatrist Robert Coles called “battle fatigue.” Having been on the front lines a bit too long, they were more than exhausted, more like burnt out, perhaps even on the verge on cracking up. Harry Belafonte, a popular black singer, therefore, personally paid and made arrangements for those “most in need” of a “complete change of scenery” to take a vacation. The destination was the newly independent nation of Guinea, where president Sekou Toure, a Marxist and leader in the Pan-Africanist movement, possessed a vision and energy that was very appealing to the members of SNCC.

Having been baptized by fire, Brown returned to a COFO stronghold in Holmes County, the well-armed, protected and largely autonomous community of black landowners called Mileston. The black farmers who benefitted from the New Deal in Mileston had established a safe haven for COFO workers and other activists seeking refuge from the hostilities of white terrorism. Mileston provided the precious space and peace of mind it took to develop a cogent political organizing strategy. Holmes County boasted a black majority (about seventy-two

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239 Carmichael and Thelwell, Ready for Revolution, 411.
240 For a discussion of battle fatigue within SNCC, see Dittmer, Local People, 320-332.
241 Carmichael and Thelwell, Ready for Revolution, 412.
242 Umoja, We Will Shoot Back, 73-74.
percent), but it did not have a single registered black voter in the early 1960s. Brown recalled how the large number of black landowners made it unique compared to other counties, because blacks enjoyed a measure of independence from white society. In the 1940s, over one hundred black tenant families managed to procure almost ten thousand acres of Delta farmland through long-term, low-interest loans from the Farm Security Administration, one of the most unique experiments in social planning during the New Deal. Several returning black veterans of World War II purchased adjacent farms as well in hopes of increasing their personal holdings and ensuring the community’s economic independence. In 1963, several African Americans from Holmes County visited the SNCC office in Greenwood, the seat of neighboring Leflore County, and invited the group to organize a voter registration campaign in Mileston. The campaign served as the first step towards the establishment of one of the strongest black political organizations on the county level in Mississippi.

The farming community at Mileston also served as the nucleus of the most effective chapter of the MFDP. It was the early planning and organization efforts of COFO project director Ed Brown that laid the foundation for the important black political victories later in 1967. Due to the belief of Stokely Carmichael that black activists from the South were reliable, he put Ed Brown in charge of voter registration in Holmes County.

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246 Brown and his younger brother both exhibited this quality multiple times, according to Carmichael, as well as Bob Mants, Willie Peacock, Randy Battle, Dory Ladner, and Annie Pearl Avery; see, Stokely Carmichael and Michael Thelwell, Ready for Revolution: The Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael [Kwame Ture] (New York: Scribner, 2003), 156, 201.
who experienced and documented much of civil rights organizing in Holmes County, asserted that Brown was one of the “most politically advanced and theoretical of the outside workers.” During his tenue, over six hundred blacks registered to vote. Perhaps ultimately more significant, he used political maps to organize along the district lines. Though she did not understand it at the time, Sue Sojourner later considered his early organizing efforts vital to the greatest successes of the MFDP.247

Many of the accomplishments of African American in Mississippi politics stemmed from the grassroots organizing of the MFDP, but Ed Brown expressed mixed opinions about their high-minded, uncompromising posture. For those left behind in Mississippi, Ed Brown recalled, the movement became more “religious in nature.” “We began to define the world as between us and them, you know, in the same way a religious person defines the world between believers and non-believers. We defined ourselves as the _pure_, and everything else was corrupt.”248 He did not believe, however, that purity provided them with a very sophisticated analysis of the political situation in Mississippi. In one later interview, Brown possessed the clarity of hindsight about the immovable stance of the MFDP. “I think it was naïve,” he admitted, “I think it was emotional…I think it was a lot of things, but it certainly wasn’t based upon a sound analysis of where you were and what it was you could reasonably expect.”249 Even though he credited the MFDP with breaking the back of segregationist politics and ushering in a “change in the power dynamics of the South,” Brown realized that politicians had “to make a choice between being pure and being effective.” In his view, the MFDP “leaned too much in the direction of purity.”250

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249 Ibid.
250 Ibid.
The MFDP served as a profound critique of the denial of black political participation in the South, and the passage of the Voting Rights Act in August 1965 opened the door to widespread black voter registration in Mississippi. All of the prominent civil rights groups, however, had largely vacated the state before the president signed it into law, and the local leaders who remained in Mississippi lacked the resources to put together effective statewide voter registration and civil rights programs in the fall of 1965. COFO had started to disintegrate in the summer and no longer possessed the organizational strength to capitalize on the law’s passage. Though no other state’s civil rights alliance had demonstrated the need for such a revolutionary measure more compellingly, MSC director Erle Johnston Jr. delighted in reports that groups with “more militant and radical attitudes” were certainly on the “decline in personnel and influence” in Mississippi.

The Child Development Group of Mississippi and the Citizens Crusade Against Poverty—The Origins of a Rural Community Development Corporation

In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson launched an impressive array of anti-poverty programs under the banner of his Great Society, which sought to expand educational opportunities for all students, elementary through college, secure civil and voting rights, increase conservation measures, improve health care for the elderly and citizens unable to afford insurance, and provide job training. Head Start was one component of the War on Poverty

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252 He believed that only fifteen members of CORE and five members of SNCC remained in the state; see, Erle Johnston Jr., memorandum, Mar 13, 1967, MSC Files, SCR ID # 6-78-0-2-2-1-1.
253 Kristin L. Ahlbe, Transplanting the Great Society: Lyndon Johnson and Food for Peace (Columbia, MI: University of Missouri Press, 2008), 44.
authorized by the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) of 1964 and administered by the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). The preschool program hoped to eradicate poverty by providing community members and parents with jobs, and for the children it instilled a sense of identity and dignity that had been missing from the lives of most poor African Americans. To ensure the “maximum feasible participation” of the poor, Title II of the Economic Opportunity Act created the Community Action Program and stipulated that 1) anti-poverty funds did not have to be channeled through state agencies and 2) that poor had to play a central role in creating and administering educational centers. The arrangement aimed to ensure that segregationist state officials could not highjack the flow of federal funding into black communities.254

Understanding that only by working outside of the local white power structure could they initiate a preschool program that adhered to the spirit of “maximum feasible participation,” OEO officials recruited an appropriate director in the form of Tom Levin, a psychoanalyst who had volunteered during Freedom Summer. He was also the inspired individual who conceptualized the Head Start preschool program for Mississippi. Levin’s personal history and professional training in childhood psychoanalysis shaped the development of the program. Having come of age during the Great Depression, he had witnessed firsthand the hardships caused by poverty and illiteracy while living with his Russian Jewish, immigrant, working-class parents in the Bronx, New York. He dropped out of high school and worked odd jobs to help support his family before enlisting in the Navy and serving in the Pacific theatre during World War II. “In Okinawa,” he recalled, “at the time of the invasion, I heard American marines and sailors

bragging about raping grandmothers, taking prisoners and knocking their teeth out for gold.\textsuperscript{255} His experiences during childhood and in the military, indeed, made a deep impression on his psyche, and he grew increasingly uncomfortable unless he spoke out against human indignities. By the time he came to Mississippi in the mid-1960s, Levin had earned a Ph.D. in psychology and educational psychology from New York University, which made him an ideal candidate to head up a pre-school education program for the poor.\textsuperscript{256}

After observing the troubled relationships between black children and their parents once they entered white schools, Levin conceived of a preschool and day care program, which built up children’s self-esteem and served as an antidote to the debilitating racism encountered in the public schools.\textsuperscript{257} He wanted the future employees and students of the preschool program to come from poor black communities in Mississippi. Thus, he sought the approval of SNCC, which had already earned the respect and trust of the very people he wanted to help. Due to liberal whites’ support of the compromise to the challenge of the MFDP, however, SNCC did not support and sometimes denounced programs developed by northern whites, fearing they would divert energy from voter registration campaigns. The grueling work and deadly violence of Freedom Summer, coupled with the disappointment of Atlantic City, left many civil rights workers angry and suspicious of other people’s intentions.\textsuperscript{258} Several of the state’s black SNCC veterans refused to work with leaders of the War on Poverty. By providing poor blacks with federal jobs, they argued, the pre-school education program had the potential to denude activism.

\textsuperscript{258} Carson, \textit{In Struggle}, 138; Dittmer, \textit{Local People}, 327.
In their opinion, money, whether public or private, never came without stipulations. Stokely Carmichael and other veterans of the Mississippi movement interested in working outside the Democratic Party, therefore, started to gravitate toward the Alabama black belt, which lacked the presence of a political organization such as the FDP.\textsuperscript{259}

Through sheer determination, however, Levin managed to reach an uneasy understanding with the national leadership of SNCC, the majority of whom realized that millions of federal dollars were coming into the communities in which they had organized over the past several years regardless of their support. According to Hollis Watkins, SNCC allowed some of its people to work in the Head Start program and receive federal salaries in order to help finance its other activities. By agreeing to include some SNCC workers on the payroll, Levin persuaded its national leadership to neither denounce nor support the preschool program.\textsuperscript{260}

Having appeased the radical members of SNCC, Levin reached out to future employees and students of the preschool program. He invited poor blacks from twenty different Mississippi communities to meet and discuss the federal program at Mt. Beulah, an abandoned Tuskegee-like college called the Southern Christian Institute which became a safe haven for African Americans after the National Council of Churches leased the property prior to Freedom Summer.\textsuperscript{261} According to one MFDP leader from Hollandale, the Head Start program seemed like the answer to a prayer. At the meeting, Levin and the other “organizers announced, ‘I have some good news for you. Money has been appropriated for Head Start and this means that if you


\textsuperscript{260} Levin agreed to hire SNCC field organizer Frank Smith as Director of Community Organizing; see, Greenberg, \textit{Devil Has Slippery Shoes}, 23-24.

\textsuperscript{261} Being one of the only large and safe meeting facilities for integrated groups, Mt. Beulah served as a shelter for homeless black sharecroppers who had been evicted from their plantations as well as the site of citizenship education workshops; for more on the National Council of Churches, see James F. Findlay, \textit{Church People in the Struggle: The National Council of Churches and the Black Freedom Movement, 1950-1970} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
find a building [and] get some children [to sign up], you can keep and teach your own children
and get paid."262 Believing that Head Start was their opportunity to obtain honorable
employment, higher wages, and important leadership opportunities, most African Americans in
attendance responded enthusiastically and decided to work with the progressive white officials
with the OEO. They voted to call the Mississippi program the Child Development Group of
Mississippi (CDGM), which operated under an umbrella project known as Mississippi Action for
Community Education (MACE). According to one project historian, Tom Levin had chosen a
“name that had the acronym MACE because just as a mace is a weapon used to strike, CDGM
was to be a weapon used to break down an old order.”263

The CDGM, a wide network of pre-schools and child care centers, developed out of the
SNCC’s freedom schools during Freedom Summer, which challenged the status quo in
Mississippi and threatened to end black subjugation. The preschool education program
empowered poor black families in the summer of 1965, when the federal government granted the
CDGM over $1.25 million under Project Head Start. CDGM director Tom Levin wanted the
children to develop a positive self-image to contradict the stereotypical, negative depictions of
blacks in the public schools. By inciting massive “community action for education,” Levin
believed that the long-term operation of the program would result in nothing short of
revolution.264

The initial success of the CDGM in empowering poor, black communities did not sit well
with white supremacist groups, which launched violent attacks on Head Start centers across the
state. Klansmen burned Head Start centers, beat several teachers, called in bomb threats, and

263 Greenberg, Devil Has Slippery Shoes, 19; Sanders, “To be Free of Fear,” 68.
264 Greenberg, Devil Has Slippery Shoes, 19.
burned crosses in front of some centers. Though the intimidation efforts of the Klan shut some schools down, the most salient threat to the preschool program was segregationist state officials in Jackson and on Capitol Hill. Criticizing the program as a breeding ground for communism and corruption, US Senator John Stennis launched a clever attack on the CDGM from his seat on the powerful Senate Appropriations Committee. The War on Poverty programs as well as the escalating conflict in Vietnam depended on the support of Stennis and his SAC, which hoped to gather enough evidence to pressure the OEO to dismantle CDGM. In late June 1965, as the CDGM center directors prepared to open the doors, Senator Stennis ordered staff members on the SAC, investigators from the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission (MSC) as well as local public officials, to investigate the preschool program. The MSC managed to infiltrate the central office of the CDGM with a paid informant, who posed as an administrative assistant and copied all correspondence, memoranda, and educational materials. The informant turned over all the evidence to Stennis, who eschewed race-baiting the organization and simply presented evidence of perceived impropriety and other information as proof that CDGM was a front for civil rights.

The first federal grant ran out at the end of the summer, and no more funds were coming into the program. The overall momentum of CDGM, nevertheless, ensured that it continued to serve an estimated three thousand children with volunteer support for another half a year. When the time came to renew funding for the CDGM, the OEO bent to the political pressure of Stennis, stipulating that the CDGM move its headquarters from Mt. Beulah, a hotbed of interracial civil rights.

265 In 1964, the MSC provided law enforcement officials with the make and model of the car driven by James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman in Neshoba County, who were murdered and placed in an earthen dam; see Katagiri, *The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission*, 164-165; Erle Johnston, *Mississippi’s Defiant Years 1953-1973: An Interpretive Documentary with Personal Experiences* (Forest, MS: Lake Harbor, 1990), 285; Dittmer, *Local People*, 371.
rights activity, to Mary Holmes College, a historically black college far away from most of the educational centers in the state. Though Tom Levin managed to delay the relocation, it cost him his position as director of the program. The OEO subsequently forced CDGM to move its headquarters to the same building in Jackson as the state FBI office as well as pushed SNCC workers out of the organization. After several months of negotiation, during which time the CDGM launched an impressive demonstration in front of Congress, sending busloads of teachers and young children to lobby for the program with games, toys, and arts and crafts supplies, the OEO finally refunded CDGM, but it provided only half of the requested amount. Even that was not enough for Stennis, who continued to pressure the OEO to cut funds to CDGM.

In early 1966, Ed Brown broke with SNCC and moved back to the nation’s capital to work for the Citizens Crusade against Poverty, a watchdog group established by a former OEO employee and United Auto Workers union president Walter Reuther to press the federal government into keeping its commitment to the poor. “Some people were critical of my going back to Washington and going to work,” Brown admitted; some of his former brothers in the struggle called him a “sell-out.” SNCC, however, had diverted most of its resources to its political project in Alabama. “I felt that we had not…finished what we were doing in Mississippi,” he contended, “I felt that we were reneging on a responsibility in terms of those people. To have encouraged those people to have taken the action, and then to walk off and leave those people in pursuit of adventure somewhere else; it was very irresponsible.” Brown realized, however, that “Mississippi had played itself out” in terms of the “public media.” For many activists in SNCC, the Mississippi movement had little potential for success in political

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266 Ed Brown, interview by Tom Dent, July 2, 1979.  
267 Ibid.
organizing; the future seemed to hold only “hard work.” Brown was gone, but he kept coming back.

Reuther supported the president’s declaration of War on Poverty, but he also realized that the federal government could not “do the job alone.” While the president’s programs were a vital “first step” towards a solution, Reuther envisioned a much broader effort, made up of public and private entities, which aimed to eliminate “all aspects” of poverty. Going beyond the efforts of the federal government, he believed the logical “second step” was the “mobilization of citizens groups at the community level.” Thus in April 1964, he called on liberal organizations such as Americans for Democratic Action, as well as progressive labor unions, churches, and activist groups, to form a national anti-poverty organization called the Citizens Crusade against Poverty (CCAP). “Neither the civil rights struggle nor the anti-poverty crusade,” Reuther argued, “can be won except as they are waged and won together.” In his endeavor to wed the civil rights struggle with the poverty struggle, Reuther and the CCAP paid the travel expenses for delegates from distressed areas such as Watts, Harlem, Appalachia, and the Mississippi Delta to visit the nation’s capital and participate in anti-poverty conferences. The purpose of the meetings was to identify the problems in poor communities and develop action strategies for potential solutions. In its role as “gadfly” to the president’s War on Poverty programs, the CCAP hoped to increase the awareness of the nation’s poor concerning federal relief programs.

The greatest tool CDGM had in its arsenal was the support of the CCAP, which proved crucial to the refunding of the CDGM, and it also received support from United States Senator

268 Ibid.
Robert Kennedy. Armed with his blessing, the CCAP formed an independent board of inquiry to investigate OEO’s charges and concluded that CDGM programs were “of the highest caliber and must be considered a striking success.” In a meeting on October 13, 1966, in Atlanta, however, an OEO delegation argued that CDGM’s board had no control. The autonomous operation of local centers, according to them, promoted disorganization, gave center directors incentives to avoid preschool education and focus on civil rights, and discouraged biracial participation and sincere efforts to collaborate with community action agencies. All of these issues, in sum, suggested that the OEO wanted a different organization to manage the statewide Head Start program in Mississippi. The new director of the CDGM, John Mudd, disagreed and believed that their alleged goals were unrealistic. Since there were two communities in Mississippi, the goal of interracial collaboration with community action agencies was not achievable:

Community means mutual cooperation of individuals who respect each other and have sufficient consensus to make cooperative endeavor possible. To gain this in a society where there have been such profound differences means you must work hard at developing the competence of those who have been deprived. A façade of biracialism in substance still preserves the dominant-subordinate relationship.

The comments from the director of CDGM were a defense of his program’s policy to let local people handle administrative affairs as a way to increase their skills as well as a sideways denunciation of “biracial” boards, which excluded working-class African Americans. John Mudd’s response reflected the type of analysis that came from a “heightened black consciousness.” As opposed to being the embodiment of “despair or resignation,” Ed Brown

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maintained that black folks had started “accepting really, out of a pragmatic political necessity, the premise that the larger society has shut off the other options and that whatever options that you do have, in terms of improving your material well-being or achieving your own liberty…resides with yourself.”

Martin Luther King Jr. had never seen anything like the CDGM. He thought it might be the nation’s greatest program in terms of grassroots participation. The staff of the CDGM, largely drawn from the MFDP, demonstrated the initiative and enthusiasm of the 1964 Freedom Schools. While black children received instruction in crowded, yet nurturing, classrooms, black adults gained employment in occupations other than domestic service and farming. Several of the people who worked for CDGM, in fact, later went into politics or became successful business leaders. “By providing people with a financial base—all those hundreds of jobs,” Ed Brown argued, the program “completely undermined the system of intimidation and violence” that white elites used to dissuade blacks from speaking out against racism. For the first time, he noticed, black folks did not “need the white man’s credit that kept him enslaved to him.”

Despite his somewhat uneasy split with SNCC, Brown remained friends with most of the folks he had known in Mississippi and made several trips back to the Delta to conduct research to develop action programs for community education. “He worked very hard on behalf of CDGM to have them refunded,” according to one MSC investigator. Ed Brown was back in Jackson working in the FDP office in the fall of 1966. He helped the CDGM move out of the Milner building and into an office at 507 Farish Street. Along with Lawrence Guyot, he served as a primary organizer of the elections within the FDP to decide if they wanted to remain with the

274 Ibid.
CDGM or go another route suggested by the OEO.276 After voting to stay with the CDGM, Brown returned to the nation’s capital for the Christmas holidays. He was back in Mississippi in January, however, and he hoped to work as a consultant for the CDGM.277

Unita Blackwell, in her biography *Barefootin’*, regarded the Meredith March as a turning point in the Mississippi movement, mainly because afterwards SNCC lacked a significant presence in the state; only “home-grown agitators,” she explained, “were left to carry on.”278 Historian Aram Goudsouzian contends that the Meredith March symbolized President Lyndon B. Johnson’s recognition that his model of consensus politics had failed, due to all the criticism stemming from his inability to act. Indeed, most civil rights groups were “on the decline in personnel and influence” by the winter. According to the director of the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission, only fifteen members of CORE and five members of SNCC remained in the state in early spring 1967.279 Marian Wright, chief counsel for the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, bemoaned the lack of civil rights activity in the state in early 1967. Claiming that only a dozen counties boasted civil rights organizations “strong enough” to establish “meaningful” political education and economic programs, she may have been the first person to acknowledge in public the existence of a new organization dedicated to community development in the Delta. She hoped that the handful of groups that remained would rally around this “community action organization” and build on what momentum remained of the movement.280

Identified as a representative of the Citizen’s Crusade Against Poverty (CCAP), Ed Brown revealed that the group was evaluating a proposal for an office in Greenville. He stated

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276 “Jackson, MS,” Oct 18, 1966, MSC Files.
277 CDGM, Jan 9, 1967, MSC Files, SCR ID # 6-45-4-95-1-1-1
that the CCAP would announce its decision in two weeks. The Ford Foundation-financed CCAP discussed the implementation of a training program in the city, because it already featured the needed “space and facilities.”\textsuperscript{281} Though the community action group was eventually headquartered in Greenville, the group originally worked out of the home of Amzie Moore. Once the Ford Foundation awarded the initial grant, Moore and Fannie Lou Hamer wanted Brown to come back to the Delta and direct the program. He wanted to come back too. He wanted to continue the work that he came there to do for SNCC.

“The most successful program offshoot” of SNCC, according to one scholar, adopted Tom Levin’s original name for CDGM.\textsuperscript{282} In one meeting at the home of Hamer in late 1966 or early 1967, Hamer, Blackwell, and Amzie Moore hammered out the foundations of MACE in one conversation. “We got to keep our people moving,” Hamer declared, “We can’t stop and rest now.” Blackwell wanted to take her activism to the next level. “We’ve gone from standing up to the power structure to breaking it down,” she argued, “We had to. It was up to us.”\textsuperscript{283}

Envisioned by CDGM director Unita Blackwell, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Amzie Moore and realized by Ed Brown and the CCAP, the Mississippi Action for Community Education (MACE) planned to use foundation grants not only to conduct registration drives but also educate the rural poor and increase the level of participation in anti-poverty programs.\textsuperscript{284} MACE also stimulated economic, social, and political development in the Delta.\textsuperscript{285} “We agreed,” explained Unita Blackwell, “that we had to find a way to keep teaching people about government and how they can work within government to make their lives better.” We “didn’t have a dime,”

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\textsuperscript{282} Greenberg, \textit{Devil Has Slippery Shoes}, 19.
\textsuperscript{283} Blackwell and Morris, \textit{Barefootin}, 166-169.
\textsuperscript{285} Blackwell, \textit{Barefootin}, 166-168; Greenberg, \textit{Devil Has Slippery Shoes}, 664-665. MACE was still a very much relevant and active organization in the Mississippi Delta at the time of this writing.
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she declared, “but our first decision was not to use federal money. We didn’t want to find ourselves in the same struggle we’d had with CDGM.” 286 With financial support from the Merrill, Ford, and Field Foundations, MACE continued the CDGM tradition of educating black communities about their rights and their responsibility to improve the quality of life in Mississippi. 287

Ed Brown developed his strategy beginning with the recognition that powerlessness and its debilitating effects marked the history of African Americans. As the nation developed into an extremely complex society—“woven into an interlocking net of huge governmental, administrative and economic institutions and organizations”—blacks folks were excluded and deprived of opportunities to acquire the types of skills and knowledge that were necessary to engage such complex structures. The egregious nature of societal exclusion inflicted major damage on American society, which could not be repaired quickly, particularly in the rural South. Brown insisted that the black community remained in a state of arrested or “underdevelopment.” 288 The white communities of Mississippi also carried stubborn, hardened views on race, and most southerners refused to abandon their distorted versions of history or reevaluate the religious views that buttressed them.

Ed Brown credited the tremendous organizing energies unleashed during the Civil Rights Movement with breaking open the doors of the closed society, exposing the lies of white supremacy, and awakening the black consciousness in so many African Americans. He also believed the Mississippi movement fell short of its larger egalitarian goals for a couple of interrelated reasons. In Mississippi, most of the organizing vigor evaporated upon the departure

286 Blackwell, Barefootin, 166-168.
287 Greenberg, Devil Has Slippery Shoes, 664-665.
of outside activists, the majority of whom had no local roots and no permanent stake in building up the black communities in the Delta. The movement lost its momentum at an important transition point, he argued, “between movement and stable organization.” In order to break down the virtually impenetrable obstacles to racial equality, SNCC and COFO had employed aggressive organizing strategies and styles of operation that Brown considered unsuitable for building permanent institutions “capable of carrying out long-term changes.” The majority of local people, therefore, even those who participated in the movement, were by-and-large unprepared to deal with the difficulties of building strong, permanent organizations in the black community. To combat the “underdevelopment” of black leaders and communities, Brown designed a community action program to “support and nurture” the “transition from movement to organization” as well as cultivate local leaders through “community worker training and education.”

Inspired by the bottom-up structure of the CDGM, the initial mission of MACE was to “build, maintain and support representative organizations of the poor,” which provided members the opportunity to control the social, economic, political, educational choices that affected their lives. Brown wanted to make resources available to identify, train, and support effective organizers as well as equip local leaders with the kind of information and technical skills needed to accomplish their objectives, and he hoped to help local organizations make the larger society more responsive to the needs of their constituents. Conceived as a “service agency,” MACE did not seek to build its own base through the establishment of branches and chapters. Rather, the entire program stemmed from a fundamental assertion “that local organizations are best developed by equipping them to meet the immediate needs of their potential members and that

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once strengthened, these organizations hold out even greater promise for bringing about changes beneficial to their members.”  

From the very beginning, Ed Brown and the CCAP intended to one day shutdown MACE, but only after each of the affiliates had matured and prepared local people to carry on without them.

The assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in April 1968 invigorated the militancy of African Americans in the mid-Delta, many of whom gathered in Greenville and mourned the loss. To fight against “the system of white racism,” nearly all of the attendees signed a petition that called for both boycotts against racist business owners and strikes of black workers. The attendees also agreed to hold a memorial march for the recently slain civil rights leader in Greenville the following week. MACE board members Fannie Lou Hamer and Unita Blackwell stood with Ed Brown, among others, in supporting the local community and continuing the fight against “the thing” that really “killed King.”

On the night of Sunday, April 7, Greenville police and firefighters responded to a dozen fires that had been set at abandoned homes and commercial buildings in the black sections of town. In the midst the repeating crashes of broken glass and smashed windows, fires in vacant homes and numerous false alarms, the level of physical violence was kept to a minimum. Around eleven o’clock at night, Officers Robert Keeling and Charles Cochran stopped Ed Brown on “a routine driver’s license check,” and when he reached for his license, his jacket came open and revealed an automatic pistol in his belt. After disarming Brown and arresting him for carrying a concealed weapon, the officers noted that the weapon contained no ammunition clip. Ed Brown was booked at 11:31 p.m. and released on one hundred dollars bond. A couple of

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291 “Mid-Delta Negroes To Give Heavy Support To Boycotts,” *DDT*, April 7, 1968, p.3.
weeks later he was found guilty of carrying a concealed weapon and fined one hundred dollars.292

The city’s full force of fifty policemen was on duty the next day to protect the memorial march in honor of the slain leader. The marchers congregated at St. Matthews AME Church and formed rows of four to begin the march through a driving rain that lasted until noon. As the procession moved down Nelson Street, more people joined the crowd, which reached in upwards of three hundred people, the majority of whom were African American.

After his conviction and the assassination of King, Ed Brown made a deliberate change in his leadership style. He almost took the operation underground, but it only seemed that way because he had started to travel to different counties and initiating the training program for the affiliates. The low profile of MACE was evident, however, in the final days of 1968, when one staff writer for the *Delta Democrat Times* included the organization in its comic review “of a memorably bad year.” Among the many fake awards such as “Worst Idea of the Year,” the newspaper declared MACE the winner of the Harry Houdini—Sergeant Shriver Award for the Most Invisible Anti-Poverty Project. Since he established MACE headquarters in Greenville at the beginning of the year, officers and staff members consistently postponed interviews, failed to return phone calls, broke appointments and otherwise dodged reporters seeking a story on what MACE did and who paid for it. The blind alley extended all the way to the nation’s capital, where reporters got the same treatment from the Citizens Crusade Against Poverty, MACE’s parent organization.293 It took almost ten years, in fact, before MACE decided to fully embrace and start to shape its public image.


MACE initially focused its most intensive training in seven counties—Bolivar, Sunflower, Holmes, Madison, Grenada, Issaquena, and Sharkey, each of which contained a sizable and stable grass roots organization that would benefit immediately from its training program. By seeking the endorsement and support of NAACP chapters, county improvement association, co-op groups, local CDGM councils, and political organizations, MACE attempted to coordinate local anti-poverty and civil rights work through the broadest possible coalition of the poor and their allies. Several other affiliates eventually received technical assistance from organizers, specifically the Tallahatchie County Union for Progress, the Panola County Voters League, and the Quitman County Community Development Organization, all of which came under the umbrella as MACE affiliates. The Madison County Union for Progress developed out of CORE and the strong local chapter of the MFDP. The Sharkey-Issaquena County Improvement Association and the Holmes County Union for Progress were also strong, battle-tested groups that gained an influential foothold as local affiliates of MACE.

Bringing together the different communities and groups in each county proved a challenge. SNCC and CORE maintained pronounced differences from the non-violent SCLC, and the presence of white supremacists was always not too far away in the state. In this most tumultuous setting, MACE implemented its leadership development training program, which required trainees to travel hundreds of miles to and from training sessions. Many of the participants received threats of reprisal from whites simply for agreeing to participate in the program. It was this hostile atmosphere that led to the opening of the training office in a former church school in Greenville, a city which Brown and other activists in SNCC considered “the

most liberal community in the Delta.” To avoid local confrontations and maintain a low profile, Brown decided not to establish an affiliate in the surrounding Washington County.295

The county affiliates required the loyalty and involvement of their members. By understanding the range of community problems and developing strategies to solve the most pressing needs, Brown believed, it was possible to sustain high levels of member support. The first responsibility of the organizers, therefore, was to conduct a survey of county needs, a “door-to-door sampling of grass roots opinion,” which could be compiled and analyzed to determine the proper deployment and timing of short-range, “quick return” projects, such as vaccination programs and street light campaigns. The surveys also revealed the feasibility of longer-range projects, such as organizing a credit union or generating funds for a self-help housing project, in organizational strongholds that long ago established a loyal membership base.296

MACE sent two community organizers to each of the target counties, and they worked out of an office that was maintained by affiliated organizations. In general, one of them worked in the office coordinating meetings, conducting research, receiving complaints, counseling local citizens and preparing training materials. The second travelled around the county establishing relationships with local contacts and aggrieved residents, organizing every community in the county into the affiliate, and generally keeping in touch with the pulse of the county.297

One of the more notable achievements of the Mississippi movement was its identification and support of a new group of leaders, many of whom, unlike the old guard, sought to establish a democratic, non-authoritarian type of relationship with their constituents. Despite their considerable skill and organizing experience, however, local leaders could not be effective due to

297 Ibid.
a host of problems related to the development of embryonic, grass roots organizations in Mississippi. The serious dearth of financial resources, as well as the general lack of knowledge about how to mobilize existing resources, proved a severe problem for black leadership in the Delta. The new leaders and their constituents also lacked access to a wide variety of information, in-depth knowledge, and technical skills required to strengthen the affiliates. The organizers worked with local groups in each county to identify and train these leaders and cultivate within them the confidence, discipline and skills required to one-day operate on their own.

The affiliate office in each county served as the nexus of communication as well as a complaint center, where people could lodge formal grievances and receive assistance. In this context, community workers took on the role of ombudsmen who used personal and organizational resources to alleviate pressing problems, acting as an advocate for individuals and arbitrator between different groups. If a woman qualified for welfare but did not receive it, for example, she needed assistance. The organizer might have to accompany her to the welfare office and make sure the social workers respected her right to enroll in the program. Early on, the role of MACE organizers as advocates of individual welfare rights made a salient impact. Ed Brown also anticipated that many of the poor would require legal aid, and he planned to provide such services through cooperation with the existing civil rights and legal services groups. MACE was the essential factor in attracting the first black law firm into the Delta later in the 1970s.\textsuperscript{298}

The presence of trained and salaried workers was important, but the development of a successful community organization also required access to capital for special projects and other organizational ventures. Though it did not award large grants, MACE considered the dispersal

of small loans on a matching basis crucial to the success of the affiliates. By making available small amounts of money ($100-$500), the central office ensured that viable field operation projects such as community center programs and county-wide workshops did not experience delays due to the lack of funds. The leaders of local groups submitted a proposal and budget to the board of directors at MACE, requesting funds for a certain project and assuring that matching funds could be raised on the local level. Upon completion of the project, the sponsoring organization filed a record of expenditures with other documents at MACE headquarters. By completing the project proposals, requesting small amounts of money, and accounting for expenditures, the workers completed projects in the community and received valuable training that would prove vital in the future when seeking large amounts of funding from private foundations.

Following three weeks of training, research, and planning, the trainees graduated to level of field supervisor and started the action phase of the program, in which they guided the activities of community workers and attempted to make them a learning experience. The field supervisor, in essence, served as a tutor who drew on his own organizing experiences to support and enhance the skills of local people. “It cannot be underemphasized,” Brown asserted, how much community workers were “in some sense always” receiving training in the field. Charles Bannerman taught courses.

299 MACE adopted a curriculum centered on the pragmatic association of training and action. The incoming trainees at MACE went through a three-week program that covered the basic techniques and theories of organization. In the first week, the program covered how to run meetings, canvass, form coalitions, and raise funds on the local level, and it also discussed the nature of movements and organizations, the goals of organizing, and techniques for mobilization. The second week sent trainees into their respective affiliated counties and interviewed the leaders of black religious, social and political organizations to determine local attitudes on civil rights and the white power structure, local leadership styles, overlapping organizational responsibilities, leaders’ opinions of other leaders, and the state of the black power structure. Armed with such information, trainees studied the county’s situation and identified pressing needs in the final week of training. By recognizing the limits of coalitions as well as the weaknesses of existing organizations, MACE trainees gained a better understanding of the problems facing the
Whereas the initial training program focused on organizing techniques, the action phase revolved around the access to and utilization of information. After conducting the survey of needs in their counties, field supervisors and community workers could request specialized training in certain fields, particularly those which required the mastery of technical information. The needs survey, for example, might reveal the impetus of establishing a farmer’s cooperative, which rented land to unemployed day laborers and sharecroppers, provided them with equipment and furnishings, diversified the growing of crops, and marketed truck crops outside the South. By drawing on the research and technical assistance of MACE, community organizers received special training and engaged in organizing farmers.

The Ford Foundation, for example, provided a grant for one of the earliest programs of a MACE affiliate to help low-income black families in Holmes and Issaquena County become self-sufficient beef cattle operators. The Mileston Cooperative Association and MACE hoped to “show farmers how to supplement their incomes by raising cattle on their own properties or on lands leased through grazing associations,” as well as assist them in “converting portions of their land from truck crop farming to pastorage.” The bulk of the foundation grant provided for annual stipends for each of the eighty farm trainees from Holmes and Issaquena Counties.\textsuperscript{300}

One of the talented and charismatic individuals discovered by MACE was Emma Cooper Harris, of Anguilla. She went on to run her affiliate and even become mayor of her town. Born on May 5, 1950 on McKinney’s plantation, about a half mile outside of town, she was the child of a Delta sharecropper, and her mother worked at the laundromat in Rolling Fork. After she graduated high school in 1967, she moved to Chicago in hopes of finding a better life. Shortly

after her arrival in the windy city, the place she worked was robbed by the Blackstone Rangers, a neighborhood organization. “I had never looked down a gun barrel in my life,” she recalled, “and that was my first experience with real violence.” It scared her so much, in fact, that she left Chicago and came back to the South.301

When she returned to Sharkey County, her mother had enrolled her in a Christian college in Natchez. She received a work-study position in the law office of George F. West, the African American businessman, recently elected city alderman and member of the local chapter of the NAACP who trained her how to be a professional receptionist.302 The attorney also showed her how to work with people most effectively. After going to the college for two years, she was hired as the choir director of the Holy Child Catholic School in Natchez. Harris had been singing in the church choir since she was four years old, and she started playing the trumpet and piano at age twelve. She was in the high school band for five years; “we were good,” she asserted. After moving on to Jackson State University, she sang in the Jackson State Interfaith Choir, which recorded a radio program that aired at 5:30 a.m. every Sunday morning.303

After she finished at Jackson State, she moved back to Sharkey County, but she could not find a decent job and ended up chopping cotton again. She soon decided to move back to Chicago, but she “couldn’t adapt to that city life.” After almost three months, she moved back to Sharkey County and started volunteering for the local FDP in late 1972. In 1973, she was officially hired by the Sharkey-Issaquena County Improvement Association (S-ICIA), an affiliate of MACE, and she stayed in their employ for twenty-four years.

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301 Emma Cooper Harris, interview by T. DeWayne Moore, June 6, 2013, Anguilla, Mississippi.
303 Emma Cooper Harris, interview by T. DeWayne Moore, June 6, 2013, Anguilla, Mississippi.
Harris had her share of run-ins with the local authorities while conducting her work for the MACE affiliate in Sharkey County. One time the police stopped her while conducting a survey of local needs. The officers believed that she was conspiring to commit criminal acts, but they did not arrest her. Bannerman sent Larry Farmer and attorney Victor McTeer to check on the situation in Rolling Fork. Anyone working for MACE could not engage in political activity due to its status as a non-profit. After seeing her carry other African Americans to the courthouse to register to vote, the mayor of Rolling Fork attempted to stop Harris from organizing any more voter registration drives. She had made several trips to the courthouse and carried as many as fifty people in a single day. One of the city officials in Rolling Fork knew both Harris and Bannerman, so he called the MACE director and told him that she was conducting registration drives in Rolling Fork. Imagine his surprise when Bannerman declared, “she better be doing some voter registration, or she ain’t going to have no job.”

Harris and her co-workers in Sharkey County worked under the Municipal Equalization, Incorporation and Annexation Project (MEIAP), helping to prepare for the municipal equalization lawsuit, which addressed the lack public facilities in the black sections of town. It was her job to conduct research at city hall about municipal funding over the past twenty years, but it was not so easy at first. She walked into the courthouse in Rolling Fork and presented a letter from MACE requesting access to the records of the municipal government, but the city attorney denied her access to the records. “They called the city attorney,” she recalled, “and he told me I had fifteen minutes to get out of the office or he was going to put me in jail.” Harris, therefore, left the building and called MACE headquarters. The next morning, local officials sent police officers to the home of Harris, inviting her back to the hall of records and saying she

\[304\] Ibid.
could spend as much time as she needed. The city attorney had received a letter from Victor McTeer, who demanded that she be given access to the records. It took her about six months to complete the entire twenty years of research, but she managed to reveal some very interesting expenditures by the city.

The equalization lawsuits of MEIAP were not so successful, because many of the towns lacked a substantial tax base to fund the equalization of service utilities. The “forgotten villages [of the Delta] have long been ‘blues’ towns” for African Americans, boasting unique names, such as Nitta Yuma, Alligator, Itta Bena, Bobo, and Metcalfe.\(^{305}\) Having spent years in isolation, MACE initiated a more successful element of the MEIAP program that breathed life back into some majority black towns. MACE workers located “lost” communities such as Metcalfe—poor, black, unincorporated villages and outlying neighborhoods—and helped the residents learn how to control their own communities. MEIAP ushered communities through the legal process of incorporation and then assisted the residents in building a basic infrastructure of community services. MEIAP managed to get over nine million dollars for Metcalfe. In first seven years, MEIAP successfully incorporated three other communities. It targeted an additional eight for incorporation and fourteen others for annexation. In sum, MEIAP leveraged $32.5 million for poor and black communities in the Delta. $12.5 million went to incorporated towns.\(^{306}\)

Ed Brown had worked together with many African American leaders in the Mississippi Delta and successfully merged several self-help groups into a weapon could have broken down the old order in the state. Under his direction, MACE brought thousands of poor black families into the social and economic mainstream from which they had long been barred. MACE developed programs for training community organizers in affiliate organizations, the


\(^{306}\) Ibid.
development of basic adult education, and efforts to make local government agencies more responsive in the delivery of social services. In March 1971, the mother of Ed and H. Rap Brown passed away in her home of a heart ailment at the age of 59. Due to the increasing legal troubles of his brother, Ed Brown vacated his position as the director of MACE in 1972. He “wasn’t militant like his brother” H. Rap Brown, according to Unita Blackwell, but “he was concerned for his family and resigned from MACE to be with them.” The primary objective of MACE was to provide training and assistance to its affiliates (which represented a constituency of an estimated 20,000 people in 1973), but the organization would soon welcome its leader, and the departure of Ed Brown brought a shift in emphasis to projects involving economic and business development.

At a time of great debate over the goals of the civil rights movement, Ed Brown laid out a constructive program that appealed to people who maintained the desire for racial equality and, lacking any formal organizational ties, were looking for better ways to bring about change. In his commitment to the black communities in the Delta, he positioned himself as a more experienced alternative to the incendiary rhetoric of black power leaders. MACE also served as a counterweight to the racial separatism of black revolutionaries. The training sessions for community action focused on the utilization of existing resources and creating action programs to solve real problems. Most of the early members of MACE affiliates wanted to explore

308 Convicted of robbery but not the attempted murder of police officers, Brown entered Attica prison in 1971. During his incarceration, he converted to Islam and changed his name to Jamiil (beautiful) Abdullah (servant of God) Al-Amin (the trustworthy). Paroled in 1976, he made a hajj, or pilgrimage, to Mecca before settling in Atlanta, where his brother was the director of the Voter Education Project. From 1976 to 1993, he operated a local grocery store in an impoverished black section of the city, as well as started a local mosque.
309 Blackwell and Morris, Barefootin’, 166-169.
practical avenues to power. Regardless of SNCC’s renunciation of racial integration as a goal and declaration about the futility of the traditional political process, African Americans in communities all over the country found the full range of political and social action strategies available to them both relevant and important enough to justify a sustained commitment to achieving the goal of racial equality within the context of American democracy.
CHAPTER THREE
RACE, RELIGION, AND PROMOTION OF MUSIC FESTIVALS IN THE QUEEN CITY

Now as the weather, crops and labor are on a boom down in this part of God’s own country, why don't you boom your Queen City of the Delta!—all the clod hoppers, both white and colored, are proud of their Queen county city and its energetic progressive and clever citizens, and I believe they sometimes boast a little of the energy displayed by them. Your readers much prefer seeing a few lines pertaining to your county and town and its progress, than to see a whole column of outside matter. Then boom her up and show her in her proper light.311

J. D. Hopper, letter to the editor of The Greenville Times, June 1887

It seems that the name Queen City of the Delta just fits our little city…There are quite a number of musicians and music lovers in Greenville, and pleasure seekers as well; and the different [minstrel] shows should make it a point to carry good music, as you will have the pleasure of meeting quite a few efficient musicians all over the Delta; and the success of your business depends largely on the quality of the music you carry.312

“Notes of Greenville, Miss: The Queen City of the Delta”
(Indianapolis, IN) Freeman, December 1916

In the early twentieth century, one of the simplest and often-used methods of selling a city in the Mississippi Delta was to adopt an appropriate and attractive sobriquet, or slogan, that appealed to professionals, tourists, investors, and private industry. The responsibility for such promotions, more often than not, fell on the shoulders of city boosters, wealthy planters, and a few local captains of industry.313 In 1915, Delta Light & Traction Company superintendent

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311 J. D. Hopper, letter to the editor, The Greenville (MS) Times, June 23, 1887, p.2.
312 “Notes of Greenville, Miss: The Queen City of the Delta,” (Indianapolis, IN) Freeman, Dec 9, 1916, p.3.
Edward J. Lenz took up the boosterish task in Greenville during the installation of its famous White Way lighting system.\textsuperscript{314} On Washington Avenue, immediately east of the Yazoo & Mississippi Valley (Y&MV) Railroad, Lenz erected a vibrant symbol of industrial development—an arched sign made of sheet metal that spelled-out in two foot tall letters of red and white electric light bulbs that Greenville was the “Queen City of the Delta.”\textsuperscript{315} The popular association with industry, inspired by the New South Creed of industrial development, proved so strong that other cities in the region challenged Greenville and adopted the very same moniker during times of municipal growth.\textsuperscript{316} Even though locals started referring to Greenville as the “Queen City of the Delta” as early as 1887, one merchant, citing the rise of downtown buildings and large-scale paving projects, referred in 1917 to his hometown of Greenwood—about 55 miles due east of Greenville—as the “Queen City of the Delta.”\textsuperscript{317} Some state newspapers at the onset of the Great Depression even referred to Clarksdale as the “Queen City of the Delta.”\textsuperscript{318} While the sobriquet eventually became affixed to Greenville, it was first associated with the city of Cincinnati, Ohio, which, after its founding in 1788, experienced spectacular growth in the ensuing decades. Long before marketing slogans and chambers of commerce, local citizens decided that their bustling city was regal and dubbed it “The Queen of the West.”\textsuperscript{319}

\textsuperscript{314} According to the plan of the Delta Light & Traction Company, two groups of workers, one assembling the posts and the other laying off the route in anticipation of burying an electric cable that furnishes the current, estimated that the initial run of lights for the White Way could be installed within a month; see “Begin the White Way,” \textit{DDT}, Apr 6, 1916, p.1.

\textsuperscript{315} In August 1942, the sign was cut down to support the war effort; see, \textit{DDT}, Aug 13, 1942, p.1.

\textsuperscript{316} In his analysis of the post-Civil War southern economy, Gavin Wright examines why the region failed to progress economically for so long. He explains that the South continued to be a low-wage regional market embedded in a high-wage national economy; see, Gavin Wright, \textit{Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War} (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

\textsuperscript{317} Due to its completion of more than 80,000 square yards of paved roads, the city of Greenwood was referred to as the “Queen City of the Delta” in 1917; see, “To Help Negroes in Better Farming,” \textit{NOTP}, Sep 30, 1917, p.51; “$150,000 for Highways,” \textit{GDH}, July 23, 1914, p.6.

\textsuperscript{318} “Guy Clark,” \textit{BDH}, June 20, 1930, p.4.

\textsuperscript{319} In May 1819, Edward B. Cooke wrote in the weekly \textit{Inquisitor Cincinnati Advertiser}: “The City is, indeed, justly styled the fair Queen of the West; distinguished for order, enterprise, public spirit, and liberality, she stands the wonder of an admiring world.” Benjamin Drake and Edward Mansfield, in the 1926 book \textit{Cincinnati}, referred to the
managers of clubs, factories, stores, medical groups, and manufacturing plants attached the popular label to their business ventures to help attract customers, reap large profits, and expand the Queen’s reputation and territory. The shiny, industrial patina in Greenville eventually wore off in the muggy heat of the great swamp and onset of the Great Depression. After President Franklin Delano Roosevelt brought his New Deal programs to the Magnolia State, it was not long, in fact, before one prominent newspaper editor declared that “the days of such grandiose slogans,” emphasizing “industrial royalty,” were over in the region. The continuing crisis of the Great Depression and the impetus of New Deal relief programs led some cities to promote the more attractive, genteel virtues of high culture and civic beauty. The Garden Club and Chamber of Commerce of Greenwood, for example, added some environmental spirit to the promotion of the town, invoking the name of the trees that blazed so vibrantly along the streets of “The Redbud City.” Recognizing the power of civic beauty as a spur for industrial development, Delta Democrat Times editor Hodding Carter lauded the city of Greenwood for drawing on the majestic elements of the local environment to attract business interests and travelers to the Delta. Indeed, he went so far as to suggest abandoning the old, industrial nickname of Greenville. By simply changing the light bulbs of two letters in the arched, metal sign, it could be made to read: “The Green City of the Delta.” Though tourists and motorists driving down the recently paved stretch of Highway 61, which ran from Memphis to Vicksburg, did not find any industrial citadels of the New South, city as the “Queen of the West.” Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, in his 1854 poem Catawba Wine, which praised the vineyards of French settlers in Cincinnati, made the term “Queen City” synonymous with Cincinnati; see, Wendy Beckman, Founders and Famous Families of Cincinnati (Covington, KY: Clerisy Press, 2014), 142; Andrew F. Smith, Food and Drink in American History: A “Full Course” Encyclopedia (Santa Barbara, CA: ABL-CLIO, 2013), 1213-14; Steven C. Tracy, Going to Cincinnati: A History of the Blues in the Queen City (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

320 The development helped establish the slogan’s legitimacy over some of its competitors, such as “Porkopolis,” which referred its status as the number one producer and processor of hog products in the country.

the landscape was marked with a luxuriance of crop vegetation and assorted stands of oak, gum, swamp cypress, pecan, and cottonwood trees.

In the late nineteenth century, two powerful cultural currents rose about in the highly industrialized regions of the United States, which fueled the construction of cultural stereotypes about the South as well as its inhabitants in the decades following the Civil War. The national recognition of the need for regional reconciliation inspired Americans who lived outside the South, particularly among people who had made significant investments in the popular perception of the region. The impetus of regional reconciliation between the North and South increased alongside the hardening of racial attitudes and the popularization of ridiculously racist histories coming out of Columbia University, where historian William Dunning had set out to prove the tragedy of Reconstruction, in which the forces of evil had displaced the rightful leaders of southern society. Since the majority of southerners accepted defeat with grace and quickly pledged loyalty to the Union, Dunning and his protégé’s argued, the South should have been admitted back into the Union immediately and without penalty. The later acceptance of mythic narratives of the Lost Cause impelled whites in both the North and the South to come together through historical revision. By putting the war as well as any debate over its origins behind them, northerners created the rhetorical space for the development of a new vision of the South as a bountiful land of blissful, happy slaves and their cotton-picking, deferent descendants, who resigned themselves to second-class citizenship. The prideful paternalists and aristocrats that Wilbur Joseph Cash later described in The Mind of the South lorded over their bucolic pastures with great pride and northerners visited out of a sense of romantic fascination.322

The Industrial Revolution and the onslaught of modernity inspired another salient cultural development—romanticism of the past. Fear of the onrush of modernity was so powerful that it later inspired the xenophobia-based horror stories of Howard Phillips Lovecraft, who started out as a travel writer longing for a pastoral New England. In New York, he became one of the most compelling horror writers of all-time, amongst the immigrant masses that had arrived at Ellis Island, which instilled within him great fear and released a torrent of creative energy.\footnote{Timothy H. Evans, “A Last Defense against the Dark: Folklore, Horror, and the Uses of Tradition in the Works of H. P. Lovecraft,” \textit{Journal of Folklore Research} 42:1 (Jan-Apr 2005): 99-135.} Karen Cox explains how the similar fears of northerners also evoked significant creative output in \textit{Dreaming of Dixie}. The often anxious response of northerners to technological breakthroughs and industrial development not only transformed the nation after the conflict, but it also led to the construction of the popular cultural image of the South.\footnote{Karen L. Cox, \textit{Dreaming of Dixie: How the South Was Created in American Popular Culture} (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 132.} The fear of modern society led the white population in the North to construct an image of the South as the antithesis of the increasingly homogenous nature of American life. For many folks in the North, the South seemed much like an historical archive, a rural repository of the nation’s most cherished and least adulterated traditions, an exotic location where Americans could find the precious elements of nature that no longer existed in the big cities of the North and Midwest.\footnote{Becky McIntyre examines the late nineteenth century accounts of travel writers from the North, and she argues that these writers made overgrown plantations commodities without diminishing northern pride in industrialization and modern society, thereby allowing their readers to immerse themselves in a past, which they ended through war and industrialization. The defeated South, for many readers, was appealing yet foreign—eccentric and mysterious, and the North seemed normal and somewhat boring, but, above all, a bastion of patriotism and virtue; see, Rebecca McIntyre, “Promoting the Gothic South,” \textit{Southern Cultures} (Summer 2005).}

Even though northerners played a major role in shaping the region’s image, southern men and women recognized that national perceptions allowed room for the establishment of their own historical discourse and romantic image of the South. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth
century, southern memorial associations erected over a thousand monuments that codified Lost Cause ideology in stone and justified secession as well as defeat as a moral victory in defense of constitutional liberties. The Lost Cause did not recognize that slavery was inhumane, nor did it identify freedom as the most important result of the bloody sectional conflict. By examining the relationship between the historical discourse forwarded in historical monuments and public education with an idealized pastoral image of the southern landscape, Karen Cox learned that southern tourism brokers recognized the preconceived notions of northern visitors and made deliberate attempts to satisfy their desires in such cities as Richmond, Virginia and New Orleans, Louisiana. In Mississippi, the once affluent residents of Natchez attracted tourists to its large plantation homes and promoted a historical narrative of the Lost Cause in travel literature and other publications in the North, which touted Natchez as an “authentic” representation of the Old South. The tourism industry that came to fruition at the turn of the twentieth century proved a leading force in facilitating regional reconciliation as well as instantiating and perpetuating white supremacist ideologies both inside and outside of the South.

The slogans turned into a series of festivals that developed along the concrete wharf at the foot of Main Street on Lake Ferguson in downtown Greenville. The federal government contracted out the construction of the $140,000, seven hundred foot long by four hundred foot wide, concrete wharf as a boat landing in 1918, and two years later the Chamber of Commerce

326 The festival tradition on the levee in Greenville, Mississippi began by celebrating important religious events and later centered its concerts on the levee on the musical performance of African American spirituals and dramatic pageants that reinforced the mythic history of the Lost Cause. The middle-class leaders of the African American community, in response, developed their own music festivals, which attracted popular jazz bands and gospel singers, to challenge the racial discourse on display in the festival tradition of Greenville.

installed lights on top of the levee to make sure it was properly illuminated at night.328 Several years after the Great Flood of 1927, the Mississippi River cut its way across a narrow strip of land at Leland Plantation, south of Greenville. The Army Corps of Engineers, faced with the reality of the natural cutoff, directed the rebuilding of the levees and banished the river to a new course several miles to the west, which created an oxbow lake out of old Bachelor Bend on the city’s western boundary.329 It was known by some as Lake Katherine until 1937, when local water sports enthusiasts initiated a campaign to rename the lake in honor of General Harley B. Ferguson, who planned and directed the river’s new path as president of the Mississippi River Commission.330

As early as 1935, the Greenville Garden Club solicited Coleman High School principal Norman Howard McGhee to recruit four hundred singers from the school as well as local churches and put together a program of “old Southern plantation spirituals” directed by Eloise Lemon on the wharf. Due to the uncomfortable, immovable nature of the hard concrete wharf, the city allowed cars to park along the levee during the performance.331 In 1938, Chamber of Commerce manager John A. Fox put together a musical program at sunrise on Easter Sunday that attracted about three thousand people—black and white, separated by white lines painted on the wharf—from Greenville, Rolling Fork, Indianola, and Rosedale. The concert featured a black choir performing an “appropriate spiritual,” as William Alexander Percy put it, which invoked a bloody scene, “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” Percy described the

vocal performance as “full of pathos and yearning and awe,” but the song reflected the experiences of blacks with the white justice system, particularly the practice of lynching. The performance of spirituals by a large group of black singers served as the biggest draw to the early morning celebration, which marked the important Protestant anniversary of God resurrecting his crucified son, who died for people’s sins.

The event increasingly fashioned its musical program to attract northern white music aficionados. The marketing strategy was at the very least facilitated by the chamber’s partnership with the Coca Cola Company. In 1940, the chamber hoped to attract tourists from the mid-West and northeast, and the Coca Cola Company had the connections to promote the religious celebration and musical event on the national level. The advertisements outside of the South hoped to attract curious individuals and music enthusiasts who had “not heard the originators of spirituals sing in their own way the compositions now known over the earth.”^332

With the help of the United States Army Corps of Engineers, the chamber managed to setup a large barge in front of the wharf as a floating stage. Fitting it with a large cross, a piano, a loud speaker system, and two microphones, the large vessel served as the backdrop for an increasingly large choir of African Americans, who unfailingly belted out all the white folks’ favorite “negro spirituals.”^333 Emma E.K. Butler and Theodosia Mathews directed and managed the large black choir in 1939, and it grew even larger the following year to include students from Coleman High School, Yerger Junior High School, and Yazoo City. In the early morning hours of the coldest Easter Sunday on record in Greenville, the directors of the program had endured thirty-degree

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^333 John Fox derived the concept from a similar service in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, which attracted over 25,000 people to the city; see, “Hymns on the Wharf,” DDT, Apr 4, 1938, p.12; W.A. Percy, “Sunrise Service,” DDT, Apr 25, 1938, p.10; “Expect Big Crowd at Sunrise Service,” DDT, April 7, 1939, p.8; “Easter Service will be Celebrated Again,” DDT, Mar 8, 1940, p.1.
drop in temperature to prepare an exhibition for a curtailed group of brave souls—perhaps a couple hundred—who showed up for prayer services on the concrete wharf.\footnote{“Water Carnival,” \textit{DDT}, June 25, 1921, p.1; “Weather Hits Delta on Easter Sunday,” \textit{DDT}, Mar 25, 1940, p.1.} The “unfavorable weather” and extremely cold temperatures, combined with the early hour of the event, not only hurt attendance in 1940, but it also discouraged organizers from scheduling outdoor events in the cold days of March. The first large gathering of people from inside and outside of Washington County to hear music on the concrete wharf would not return the following year.\footnote{John A. Fox, letter to the editor, \textit{DDT}, Apr 10, 1939, p.2; “County Chamber of Commerce Holds Last Meet of the Year,” \textit{DDT}, Mar 28, 1940, p.2.}

In 1941, rather, the chamber of commerce decided to organize its inaugural Water Carnival to promote the recently-created Lake Ferguson as the “water playground of the Delta.” The town of Lake Village, Arkansas, which sits on the other side of the river, at the edge of Lake Chicot, the largest oxbow lake in North America, had introduced the water festivals in the region after World War I, and the citizens of Greenville participated and patronized the event as well as the Arkansas Delta Band Festival, which included a water festival, complete with music concerts and a bathing suit contest.\footnote{“Greenville Band to Have Part in Delta Festival,” \textit{DDT}, Aug 25, 1937, p.1.} Introducing the benefits of Lake Ferguson, Greenville’s program for the Water Carnival included a host of motor boat races, swimming matches, as well as a risqué “bathing beauty revue.”\footnote{“Plans Launched for First Annual Water Carnival,” \textit{DDT}, Jan 14, 1941, p.1.} To raise the estimated $5,000 needed to finance the celebration, the finance committee planned to canvass local businesses, civic and social clubs, and private individuals for donations. “We’re trying to show them that we are going to give them more than entertainment,” one carnival booster informed, “they will be financially rewarded with folding money in their registers.”\footnote{“Water Carnival Committees are Bombarding Clubs,” \textit{DDT}, Apr 9, 1941, p.3.} The city fathers contributed three hundred
dollars to kick off the fundraising campaign, and contributions soon poured into the finance committee. An enthusiastic group of watersports enthusiasts started the campaign and raised the full amount in only two weeks. As far as publicity, advertisements and articles about the carnival graced the pages of newspapers as far away as Jackson and Water Valley, and the promoters expected as many as ten thousand people to visit the city during the two-day extravaganza.

The producers of the Water Carnival also propagated a more ominous mission to shape the contours of public and historical discourse through the dramatization of a “giant historic spectacle…on a floating stage in Lake Ferguson.” The floating performance space offered a relevant background for depicting the “river scenes so much a part of Greenville life.”

Though the aesthetic nature of the theatrical production was ostensibly its most attractive feature, it also promised a celebration of the community’s shared mythologies and values in the form of carefully controlled interactions between performers, audience members, and their surroundings. To compile the “mighty story” of Greenville, local officials and intellectuals—namely, local historian Eunice Stockwell, cosmopolitan author Will Percy, former mayor Charles Williams, and state tax commission chair Alfred Stone, the last of whom a fellow public servant described as “perhaps the most profound student of the race question in this country”—volunteered to serve on a historical committee and prepare a pageant script, which, in the committee’s opinion,

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340 “All Committees are Working with Great Enthusiasm,”  *DDT*, Apr 27, 1941, p.15.
possessed legitimate educational value; the narrative also held power to influence public perceptions of race, gender, place, and the historical discourse of the Lost Cause.\footnote{“Water Carnival Pageant Unfolds Mighty History,”} \textit{DDT}, May 18, 1941, p.7.

The committee procured the directorial services of Cecelia Freeland, a Mississippi native and veteran pageant director who joined the Rogers Company of Ohio in 1923 upon completing her studies of dramatics and pageantry at the Emerson School of Boston. She enjoyed a national reputation for having staged “grand pageants” in almost every state.\footnote{“Director for Water Pageant to Arrive at Gulfport Soon,”} \textit{BDH}, Jan 17, 1939, p.7. Presbyterian minister Paul Tudor was the chairman of the talent committee tasked with acquiring the services of two hundred black “jubilee singers” to participate in, what one reporter aptly described as, the “history making, history portraying project.”\footnote{“Four Hundred to be in Cast of Historic Pageant,”} \textit{DDT}, Apr 29, 1941, p.1. He trusted the duties of directing all the black participants to a middle-class black widow named Emma Jones Martin, who served as choir director at Mount Mariah Baptist Church.\footnote{After losing her husband in the 1930s, Emma Jones Martin worked in a doctor’s office as well as owned and improved her home in Greenville; “Emma Martin to Direct Negro Parts,” \textit{DDT}, May 12, 1941, p.3.}

The theatrical presentation on each night of the carnival sensationalized the history of the Lost Cause in Washington County in a series of episodes interwoven with “dialogue, symbolic and formation drill dancing, and with appropriate music and settings with beautiful costuming.” An enthusiastic throng of ten thousand or more visitors and locals filled the concrete wharf and forced some folks to remain on the green banks of the levee as the floating pageant opened in a Chickasaw Village, with a primitive, pre-European contact scene of life in early America.\footnote{“Hundreds Take Part in Mammoth Delta Panorama,”} \textit{DDT}, May 27, 1941, p.1. The subsequent episode depicted a host of daunting challenges for the pioneers who engaged an uncharted highway called the Mississippi River, which led to a “business deal” with the Chickasaw that transferred all of the land in the Mississippi Delta to the United States, the

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotetext[1]{“Water Carnival Pageant Unfolds Mighty History,”} \textit{DDT}, May 18, 1941, p.7.  
\footnotetext[2]{“Director for Water Pageant to Arrive at Gulfport Soon,”} \textit{BDH}, Jan 17, 1939, p.7.  
\footnotetext[3]{“Four Hundred to be in Cast of Historic Pageant,”} \textit{DDT}, Apr 29, 1941, p.1. 
\footnotetext[4]{After losing her husband in the 1930s, Emma Jones Martin worked in a doctor’s office as well as owned and improved her home in Greenville; “Emma Martin to Direct Negro Parts,” \textit{DDT}, May 12, 1941, p.3.}  
\end{footnotesize}
acquisition of land for cultivation. While the “trail of tears and death” resulting from the 1830 Indian Removal Act and the concomitant trade in enslaved Africans was wholly absent from the pageant narrative, the historical committee summarized the experiences of blacks in a scene that one journalist described as the “coming of the Negroes,” a thoroughly and carefully constructed as well as “richly re-enacted” fiction sure to please even the most demanding of bucolic desires: “Envision a cotton field, the source of wealth for all this country and the Negroes, carrying their sacks of cotton, treading a path from field to weigher, their haunting spirituals echoing over the broad expanse of Lake Ferguson.” Flashes of light and a quick scene change moved the story forward to the 1860s, when “early mothers and young sweethearts” toiled for the Confederacy, making quilts, bandages, and uniforms for the “young, handsome, adventurous” soldiers headed off to war.

The “climax of the thrilling story” reiterated the myth of the Lost Cause and reinforced the popular racial discourse of liberal paternalism and deference that dominated in Greenville. It depicted the story of Martin Marble, whose “dramatic hiding of county records” prevented their destruction when the Yankees burned down the antebellum town of Greenville. Marble was the trusted body servant of wartime sheriff Andrew Carson.\(^{350}\) The drama did not end with the sad return of defeated rebels; rather, it concluded on a pleasant note, with the respectful body servant doing as the sheriff commanded and saving the records so that all the landowners could retain their plantations. The enslaved African American, in essence, preserved the basis of white privilege and white supremacist ideology, a powerful symbol that made racial segregation seem natural, even critical to maintain the way of life in the South.

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After favorable reviews of the historical pageant as well as the Water Carnival, choir director Emma Martin revealed that each of her charges had accepted their roles in defiance of prominent local blacks. According to DDT guest editor Don Weatherbee, the “so-called leaders” of the black community “refused to take part in the pageant,” arguing that “such activities as picking cotton and portraying slaves” were “beneath their dignity and an insult to their pride.”

The producers attempted to recruit some of the black church choirs of Greenville, all of whom demanded compensation; thus, the black singers who participated in the Water Carnival were recruited from surrounding plantations and apparently received no compensation.

Not only was it beneath their dignity to take on such stereotypical roles in the pageant, but the insulting, injurious displays of racist discourse came hot on the heels of the well-received Delta Cotton Maker’s Jubilee (DCMJ), a black-organized fete promoting constructive racial politics, African American musical traditions, and the “good-will and advancement of Negroes in the Delta.” DDT editor Hodding Carter believed the Jubilee was a much “bigger success…than anybody had anticipated” due to a “lot of work and a lot of intelligent” design by the “colored committee,” which included Delta Leader editor H.H. Humes, Leland undertaker Thomas Dillon, and local print shop operator Levye Chapple, who served as public relations director for the DCMJ.

Earlier in April, members of the committee had invited Ohio-based minister Glenn T. Settle and the Wings over Jordan Choir, the “world’s foremost singers of Negro spirituals,” to make the Number Two School Auditorium in Greenville one stop on their national tour. Considered an early voice in the black freedom struggle, Settle’s music offered a powerful and uplifting message in the 1940s; according to one admirer, his music “gave the black people...

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352 Hodding Carter, “They Deserve Credit,” DDT, May 1, 1941, p.10.
353 “Wings over Jordan,” advertisement, DDT, Apr 6, 1941, p.10.
hope” and encouraged them to “sing those songs, written by black writers.” Settle was later recognized for his distinguished achievements in improving race relations from the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. The stirring performance of the Wings over Jordan Choir in Greenville might have had the same encouraging effect on the black leaders who organized the Jubilee.

The “colored committee” managed to garner the support of white politicians and institutions. Greenville mayor Milton Smith issued a proclamation calling on all “white citizens of the community to lend all possible cooperation toward the successful observance of this day” and it’s “most worthy objectives” to promote “the integration of Negroes into all movements designed for salvation and advancement of our country and section…by encouraging our people to, in all ways humanly possible, help King Cotton on his throne, by making it better in the fields and using it in any and all ways we can.”

Believing the event would advance the “moral, financial, and other interests” of the region, the Washington County Board of Supervisors even allocated a nominal amount to publicize the DCMJ.

The Jubilee also attracted black as well as some white jazz enthusiasts with the headlining performance of legendary jazz pianist Duke Ellington and his world famous orchestra. Having once performed in Greenville at the “colored school on Redbud Street” in November 1938, one local advertisement hailed Ellington as the “The King of Jungle Music,” a

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354 Settle and his Wings over Jordan Choir achieved national fame when their radio show was picked up by the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) in January 1938. The national broadcasts allowed black folks across the country, including gospel scholar Horace Boyer, to hear the black-controlled radio program, which conveyed much more than religious inspiration. “We were in the heat of segregation,” Boyer recalled, “sitting on the back of the bus, going to a different bathroom, drinking from a water fountain, [and] going to a different school, but, on Sunday morning, we became citizens of the United States, because we could turn on that radio and we could hear this singing, and there was no mistaking—these were black people”; see, David C. Barnett, “Radio Show Chronicled Blacks’ Harsh Realities,” National Public Radio, website, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyid=87780799 [accessed April 5, 2015].


356 The country board provided fifty dollars to the DCMJ; see, “Allowance to the DCMJ,” DDT, July 1, 1941, p.7.
racialized advertising gimmick attached to his music to attract local whites.\footnote{Duke Ellington, who one Greenville journalist called “The King of Jungle Music,” performed at a dance in Greenville at the “colored school on Redbud Street” in November 1938; he received $1,000 for his performance at the DCMJ; see, “Financial Report of the Delta Committee,” \textit{DDT}, May 27, 1941, p.3.; see, “Ellington Here Thursday,” \textit{DDT}, Nov 2, 1938, p.2.} As Graham Lock explained in \textit{Blutopia}, the association of his music with the jungles of Africa derived not from the “cynical opportunist or ardent Africanist” agenda of Ellington and his management, but rather from the “jungle” themed productions of the Cotton Club, which white publicists contrived to attract white audiences.\footnote{Graham Lock, \textit{Blutopia: Visions of the Future and Revisions of the Past in the Work of Sun Ra, Duke Ellington, and Anthony Braxton} (Duke, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 82-84.} The dapper demeanor of Ellington and his orchestra, which wore tuxedos, hardly fit with the image associating his music with a savage, uncivilized African past, revealing the utility of racial discourse to expose white southerners to the vibrant, popular developments in the music traditions of African Americans. For most whites, however, the highlight of the “musical feast” consisted of the “Spirituals and Jubilees, as only Negroes can sing.”\footnote{“Huge Ensemble of Negro Voices at Cotton Jubilee,” \textit{DDT}, Mar 6, 1941, p.10.} As manager of the two hundred voice jubilee chorus, the committee selected Theodosia Matthews, a college-educated woman “widely known in religious circles,” who combed over the Delta and found the most talented black singers to participate in the program of black spirituals.\footnote{“Huge Ensemble of Negro Voices at Cotton Jubilee,” \textit{DDT}, Mar 6, 1941, p.10.} Louisiana native E.K. Butler, the music director in the city’s black schools, served as the conductor of the ensemble, and Leyser Holmes, musician and English instructor at Coleman High School, provided musical accompaniment on the piano.\footnote{In conjunction with the celebration, the black schools of Bolivar County shut down on the day of the Jubilee so that students could participate in Cleveland, and both Washington and Sunflower County schools closed the following day to allow student participation in Greenville. The first day of the Jubilee attracted an estimated six thousand spectators to the courthouse in Cleveland on April 29, 1941. Greenville’s black and white citizens lined the streets on the second day as a parade, featuring floats, marching bands, and official car, wound like a great snake through the business district of the city. Throngs of mostly black spectators gathered at the Number Two School to hear the speeches of black educators and administrators; see, “Big Parade Featured in Cotton Makers’ Jubilee,” \textit{DDT}, April 30, 1941, p.1, 3.}
In its promotion of a widely-praised aspect of African American culture, the Jubilee used the allure of music to attract white audiences and demonstrate the intellectual capacity and organizational ability of blacks. The jungle jazz and old spirituals, however, were heavily encrusted with racial stereotypes. Though Levye Chapple, and other blacks, asserted that the spirituals evoked a spirit of perseverance and offered hope for future, thus providing the foundational elements of racial uplift, Gavin James Campbell explained that local whites listened to the spirituals and heard the tonal validation of racial stereotypes, such as the “faithful black mammy” and all her “darky” acquaintances.362

The Jubilee did not pose an outright challenge to Jim Crow; rather, it assured whites that segregation—as a solution to racial tension—was acceptable to the black community. Despite the overarching power of white supremacy, the Delta’s white minority possessed deep-seated fears and held tight to the so-called “plantation melodies,” the performance of which served to salve the distressed spirits of the Jim Crow South. The experience of social privilege ultimately allowed whites in Greenville to develop a relationship to black music and African Americans that was both hedonist and humanist.363 It is indeed the same sort of relationship that has facilitated the contemporary myth of southern redemption through the mere love of black music.

While the Jubilee proved a well-organized celebration highlighting the growing and durable record of black achievement, the divine aesthetics of black spirituals, and the innovative musical developments of black musicians, it failed to alter the oppressive racial atmosphere in the mid-Delta. The careful ideological construction of the Water Carnival’s historical pageant

undermined the constructive racial politics on display at the Jubilee. Don Wetherbee, the twenty-five-year-old acting editor of the *DDT*, admitted that he had not anticipated such “intelligent effort” and musical displays which made the Jubilee a “success.”³⁶⁴ His mood towards local black leaders and singers devolved, however, upon learning of their prideful refusal to participate in the Water Carnival. “Is the making of cotton,” he asked, “which the Negro so ostentatiously celebrated…but a few weeks ago…now beneath their dignity?” Having been keen “to promote better understanding between Negroes and whites,” Wetherbee invoked the liberal white record of financial support to black celebrations and activities, despite the charge that some of the fundraising efforts turned out to be rackets, or “vicious shakedowns.” In the future, the acting editor believed white folks might be a “lot more reluctant to support” the black community. Citing the autobiography of William Alexander Percy, which told stories of blacks refusing to work during the great flood, Wetherbee concluded that the “false pride and ingratitude” of local blacks would remain in the public memory for a long time.³⁶⁵

Neither the Delta Cotton Maker’s Jubilee nor the Water Carnival made a return appearance in 1942, because the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941 propelled the United States into World War II. Once the Allies defeated the Axis Powers, some folks suggested organizing a sequel to the first—and what was to have been an annual—Water Carnival, but the concept failed to garner much support in the beginning.³⁶⁶ After the nearby resort city of Lake Village, Arkansas organized its 1947 Water Carnival, which attracted an estimated ten thousand people and filled the cash registers of local merchants, however, the Greenville Chamber of Commerce and the Jaycees moved to reconstitute the Water Carnival.

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³⁶⁴ Don Wetherbee, “They Deserve Credit,” *DDT*, May 1, 1941, p.10.
Over the weekend of July 4, 1949, the celebration featured only a parade, boat races, and a beauty pageant. Due to the increasing level of water pollution, swimming contests were no longer an option. The lackluster celebration had failed to attract a large crowd and re-invigorate enthusiasm. Due to increasingly poor fishing and pollution in Lake Ferguson, the celebration went away seemingly for good.

Brown’s Delish Shop, a popular restaurant and bar in the 1960s, served as an important meeting place for a broad range of folks in Greenville, including hippies, semi-hippies, rednecks, good ‘ole boys, artists, writers, and musicians. It was one of the more permanent local institutions as well as a cultural cauldron of the city’s segregated, yet diverse white community. The patriarch of the business was Russell Lloyd Brown, the son of sharecroppers from Yalobusha County, who moved to the Delta in the 1920s. To help support his large family, he entered the fields at an early age, dropping out of school with only an eighth-grade education.

He had experienced the rigors of agricultural labor, and he saw little incentive in staying on the farm. In the mid-1930s, he married Agnes Hayes and moved to Clarksdale. Toward the end of the decade, the couple moved to Greenwood for a couple of years to work at a bakery.

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370 In 1940, Russell and Agnes lived in Greenwood with their young son Raymond; see, 1940 US Census: Greenwood, Leflore, Mississippi; Roll: T627_2043; Page: 11A; Enumeration District: 42-24.
Ambitious, assertive, and driven, Russell Brown moved his family to Greenville in the early 1940s and opened Brown’s Delish Shop. Over time, the enterprising couple established a profitable business and erected a one-story brick building to expand the restaurant, which became a very popular location for school banquets and civic club meetings. In 1951, he opened the Tap Room adjacent to the Delish Shop, which featured a beer bar at the center of a modern gaming room. The “experiment,” as he put it, was a huge success, as the demand for draft beer far exceeded his expectations. The economic triumph of the restaurant also proffered a broad range of new social relationships. According to one writer, Brown soon became “widely known and highly popular in sports circles throughout the Mid-South.” Not only was he an avid spectator and supporter of several local sports teams, he also sponsored one of the first Little League Baseball teams in Greenville. Brown’s passion for sports no doubt made a deep impression on his oldest son, Raymond, who excelled as a football player in high school and later at the University of Mississippi. The popular and disciplined restaurant owner died of a massive heart attack on April 1, 1953, leaving behind a pregnant wife and three sons—two of them very young.

Jerry Russell Brown (b. November 1950) and Donald Hayes Brown (b. October 1951) never really knew their father. Unlike their older brother Raymond, the two young brothers lacked a real passion for sports—not to mention an abundance of athletic ability. Instead, they developed a love of art, especially music. The rhythm and blues music that disc jockey John Richbourg played on Nashville radio station WLAC made its way into the ears of many youths.

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371 The new building was located 814 Main Street; see, “Two Building Are Being Erected Here,” DDT, Oct 31, 1944, p.8; Brown also converted a service station into a restaurant at the cost of one thousand dollars; see, “Building Estimates,” DDT, June 7, 1948, p.5.
in Greenville. Having watched the films of Elvis Presley, as well as the performances of the Beatles, the two brothers started listening to rock and blues records, eventually developing an intense yearning to play rock ‘n roll. Agnes Brown, therefore, bought her youngest sons a couple of guitars and paid for the personal instruction of a local African American musician, Louis Nichols, who on occasion performed at the Delish Shop.

While rock ‘n roll was very popular with several young white musicians who came of age in the 1950s and 1960s in the Delta, the most direct influence on many aspiring guitar players in Greenville was a versatile musician named Louis Nichols, who had performed and offered musical instruction for decades. He not only performed at local jukes and cafes, but also performed at various ceremonies and festivals in the white community. His “core business,” in the opinion of one former student, was giving white children private lessons on the banjo, guitar, and piano.375 Nichols, indeed, provided unique and professional instruction for a host of talented young musicians in Greenville.376 For example, he taught an eleven-year-old Sid Selvidge, who later enjoyed some success as a folk singer, how to “play his first lick” on the guitar in the 1950s.377 He used no printed music, no music theory, and “no dotted eighth notes.” Nichols played by ear, and he taught several young men from “across the track” to play by ear as well.378

Little is known about the early life and music career of Louis Nichols, who earned the moniker “Snowball” during his later years in Greenville. He was born on January 31, 1890 in Memphis, Tennessee, according to one probable military registration card. At the time of his

376 In one conversation, Greer Whitacre revealed that Nichols used to give him lessons at his home in Greenville; see Greer Whitacre, unrecorded conversation with T. DeWayne Moore, Doe’s Eat Place, Greenville, Mississippi, September 6, 2014.
registration, he worked as a chauffeur for a chemical company in Memphis.  

In 1928, Nichols married Carrie Robinson and moved to Greenville, where he played bass and banjo on boats steaming up and down the Mississippi River. One census enumerator listed his occupation as a “musician” in a “traveling orchestra” in 1930. According to his obituary, Nichols at one time played with Louis Armstrong in New Orleans. He also travelled to perform “incidental music” in Benton Harbor, Michigan at the House of David, a religious community of naturalists and vegetarians, which the Michigan Tourist Council promoted as a “unique…travel attraction” in the mid-1960s. In later life, Nichols practiced his trade on an almost exclusive basis in the Delta. 

One former student, in an overly romantic recollection, recently described Nichols as “the prototypical blues icon” as well as an authentic representation of the “certified 1960s blues.” He based his assertions on several observations about the character of the seventy-something year-old musician—namely, that he was a poor, old, black musician with rough hands who possessed a beat-up old guitar and a penchant for alcohol. The rough leathery hands of Nichols, which he attributed to the rigors of a “day-job,” had over the years removed the finish on the neck of his guitar. His early 1950s Buick, which boasted an exterior somewhere between flat black and rust, “sputtered and spit” as it pulled into the driveway. “It sputtered worse,” he recalled, “when he

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379 The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs lists his birth date as September 1, 1891; see, U.S., Department of Veterans Affairs BIRLS Death File, 1850-2010 [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011; Louis Nichols World War I Registration Card, Registration State: Tennessee; Registration County: Shelby; Roll: 1877595; Draft Board: 5.
380 In 1931, Louis Nichols lived with Carrie at H307 North Hinds Street, and he worked as a “musician”; see, 1931 Greenville, Mississippi City Directory, p.152; 1930; 1930 US Census, Greenville, Washington, Mississippi; Roll: 1171; Page: 13A; Enumeration District: 0008; Image: 159.0; FHL microfilm: 2340906.
started it up after each lesson.” The student also remembered that Nichols often “reeked of the smell of whiskey” upon arrival, an assertion corroborated in the local courts. On more than one occasion in the mid-1960s, Nichols received fines for driving under the influence of alcohol, among other traffic violations.

The student’s depiction of Nichols as an “authentic” Delta bluesman, however, failed to convey an accurate portrait of the musician. Like many other professional black musicians in the Delta, Nichols provided entertainment for the elite, white country club crowd, at least when he could get the gigs. His livelihood was in many ways dependent on his popularity in the white community. In one interview, Hollandale-based blues musician Sam Chatmon recalled that Nichols often “played the lower end of Washington down there in that club [ran by] the big-up people,” an all-white establishment called the Highland Club. As a one-man band, he also provided musical entertainment at private supper parties, special events such as Luau’s and wedding receptions, as well as arts celebrations at the courthouse in Washington County.

Nichols also entertained elite, local whites at a few events that revolved around romanticized images of the old South, which sometimes required his acquiescent portrayal of black stereotypes—a practice so common in southern minstrel shows, such as the Silas Green Minstrels, of New Orleans. In 1961, for example, newspaper editor Hodding Carter organized

385 Chatmon had also performed at the Highland Club; he chortled about its lack of sound equipment. He could not believe that the owners “called themselves big shots and didn’t even have a sound system!”; see Sam Chatmon, interview with Jake Ayers, Owen Brooks and Richard Haxton, Dec 28, 1977, MDAH and Washington County Library System Oral History Project: Greenville and Vicinity, p.31.
387 Greenville was a regular stop for many travelling minstrel shows during the era of Jim Crow. The Silas Green Minstrel Show was “real good,” according to one Greenvillian, and the city served as host to several other acts, such as Sugar Foot Green Minstrels, Rabbit Foot Minstrels, Huntington Minstrels, Alabama Minstrels and the minstrel
a debutante ball at his home to celebrate the centennial anniversary of the Civil War, and he hired Nichols to provide music for dancing. All of the young white Greenvillians arrived in costume; the women donned the flowing dresses of southern belles as well as “enameled Confederate flags [on] their charm bracelets,” and the men dressed in military garb, “obviously representing every regiment of the Confederacy.” Even though one journalist reported that Nichols’ repertoire centered largely on “the music of the Old South,” he also performed some up-beat music that had those “hoop skirts of another generation” swirling around “in dance steps of today.”

His set list was in all likelihood similar at the Highland Club, for his performance at a plantation-themed debutante ball, which featured decorative, miniature cotton pickers on every table. The city of Leland likely demanded the same sort of repertoire at the 1968 Leland “Rally Days” Festival, a six day extravaganza that included parades, political rallies, art shows, and “old fashioned auctions,” during which the Chamber of Commerce served free watermelon to people during his performance as a one-man band. Developing from and reflecting the power relations that remained in the Delta, the stereotypical association of black folks with watermelon was commonly accepted as truth and not seen as problematic well into the 1970s.

The accounts of his 1969 performance at the Cotton Carnival Blues Festival (CCBF) in Memphis, however, best demonstrate how white southern audiences expected to see a racialized musical performance and ultimately witnessed one from Louis Nichols. The very name of the festival, indeed, “pricked the conscience and tugged at the sensibilities,” as one writer put it, because black folks had never enjoyed a kinship with the annual, week-long carnival put on for the show of A.G. Allen; see, John W. Johnson, interview by Roberta Miller, Apr 28, 1977, MDAH and Washington County Library System Oral History Project: Greenville and Vicinity, p.101-106.

389 “Highland Club is Setting for Party Honoring Miss Ganier, Miss Kimbrell,” DDT, Aug 28, 1967, p.5.
white socialites and elites. Despite having often performed for white audiences, Nichols was perhaps an unwilling participant in the perpetuation of racial stereotypes about blues singers in Mississippi. It was most likely true, in the opinion of one writer, that Nichols had been hitting the bottle before taking the stage. According to the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, it took him almost twenty minutes to “get organized, pull his drum and equipment from under the curtain at stage center, attach the foot pedal to the drum, pick up the mike when it fell on him, and all the time telling a wild story, something about some boys and a preacher.” Perhaps it was inebriation that led to several “misllicks” during his set, but the mostly young, white audience nevertheless offered up a most enthusiastic response to the performance. Nichols was a veteran performer who could play the blues, but, as one writer commented, he had no problem acting the “buffoon if such a performance delighted the audience.”

Whether as a competent performer, a mentor and instructor, or as a local drunk who sometimes played the stereotypical role of a Jim Crow entertainer—he made an impression on a host of music enthusiasts and aspiring young musicians in the Delta. For Jerry and Donnie Brown, however, he served as only the earliest direct source of inspiration in a thriving local music scene in Greenville. One “old country guy” named Claudie “Bud” Roden, a truck driver who received his music education while growing up in the tenant farming communities of the Delta, showed the brothers a few tricks on the guitar. They received even more instruction

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393 McKee and Chisenhall, *Beale Black & Blue*, 103-104.
394 Born in Humphreys County in 1928, Claudie “Bud” Roden was the son of white tenant farmers who later moved to Sunflower and Yazoo counties. After Roden, as well as several of his brothers, served in field artillery units during the Korean War, he moved back to the Delta and worked as an automobile mechanic in Leland. In the late 1950s, he moved to Greenville to drive trucks for the National Packing Company; see, 1930 US Census, Beat 2, Humphreys, Mississippi; Roll: 1149 Page: 8A; Enumeration District: 0007; Image: 861.0; FHL microfilm: 2340884; 1940 US Census, Yazoo, Mississippi; Roll: T627_2080; Page: 1A; Enumeration District: 82-
from an elder musician named Charlie Ross, the vocalist and rhythm guitarist for a well-known local group called the Phantoms, which, according to the *DDT*, developed a “reputation for competence in rock ‘n roll” in the mid-1960s by playing shows in Monroe, Louisiana and Helena, Arkansas, as well as Clarksdale, Rolling Fork, and Oxford.\(^\text{395}\) According to Donnie Brown, no other white bands in Greenville grappled with blues and rock music in the early 1960s. The Phantoms not only included blues songs in their repertoire, but also performed with a blue light in the bass drum. Taking them under his wing, Charlie Ross played an important role in showing the young musicians that blues were the roots of rock ‘n roll.\(^\text{396}\)

It was largely the daring repertoire and performances of the Phantoms that inspired the brothers to put together their own band, the seeds of which germinated through their kinship with a slightly older guitarist, James “Bud” Cockrell. Cockrell’s father had once played with Ernest Tubb, but he suffered from persistent health problems, which adversely affected not only his musical abilities but also his professional opportunities, leaving his family mired in poverty. Cockrell spent much of his teenage life at the home of Agnes Brown, who supported his interest in music and even bought him a guitar.\(^\text{397}\) Jerry Brown and Bud Cockrell were naturals on the guitar. As early as 1964, the duo performed guitar versions of “What I Say” by Ray Charles at the Exchange Club Talent Show.\(^\text{398}\) With an eye for other talented musicians, Cockrell soon convinced drummer Morson Emerson and keyboard player John Avent to form a band, which,

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\(^\text{396 Donnie Brown, telephone interview by T. DeWayne Moore, June 4, 2014, Greenville, Mississippi.}\)

\(^\text{397 Donnie Brown, telephone interview by T. DeWayne Moore, June 4, 2014, Greenville, Mississippi.}\)

\(^\text{398 Brown and Cockrell did not win the Exchange Club Talent Show; see, “Young Dancer Wins Local Talent Show,” DDT, Feb 2, 1964, p.1.}\)
for at least a while, was called the Temptations. The bassist was none other than “Downtown” Donnie Brown.

In early 1967, the band changed its name to Just Us and started to perform at local clubs and private parties in Greenville, eventually earning a good reputation in the region. Similar to professional black musicians in the Delta, the young rock band also found itself in demand among local white elites, who sometimes paid healthy sums for their services. In May 1967, Just Us performed at an “Old South” themed banquet and dance for over one hundred people at the community center in Shaw, Mississippi. The decorations put up by the members of El Club Los Alegres (Club Cheerful) depicted a scene “from the South of the past,” which included a “southern mansion” flanked by a white picket fence, a bunch of trees, “magnolia branches and blossoms,” as well as a healthy amount of Spanish moss. The limited, as well as conservative, nature of local engagements impelled the band to broaden their horizons not only musically but geographically.

The young musicians got their first opportunity later in the year, when they met a slightly older, local, and soulful musician named Lonnie Duvall. Having recently recorded in Memphis with Booker T & the MGs for a subsidiary of Stax Records, he convinced the members of Just Us to form a new, larger group and perform original material. It remains difficult to discern

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399 Charlie Ross and the Phantoms performed with “The Temptations” at a WDDT-sponsored back-to-school event in September 1964; see, DDT, Sep 10, 1964, p.2; Donnie Brown, telephone interview by T. DeWayne Moore, June 4, 2014, Greenville, Mississippi.

400 Shortly after changing the band name, the 18-year-old Cockrell convinced his younger bandmates to perform at a club in New Orleans, which landed them in jail for being underage. Upon their return to the Delta, Just Us performed at Al’s Supper Club in the fall of 1967; see, Advertisement, DDT, Sep 1, 1967, p.3; Just Us also performed at the Greenville Teen Club in late September 1967, following the Friday night football game; see, “Football Dance Planned,” DDT, Sep 21, 1967, p.2; Just Us sometimes took gigs for private parties at the Knights of Columbus Hall; see, DDT, Oct 24, 1967, p.5.


402 In 1966, Hip Records released a couple of 45 rpm records featuring the original music of Lonnie Duvall, specifically the songs “Cigarettes,” “Street Walker,” and “Your Mother and Daddy Are Right.” Booker T and the MGs were the backup band on the recordings.
who came up with the unique new band name, but the group of musicians eventually agreed to call themselves The Candy Shoestring.\footnote{The Candy Shoestring, under the leadership of lead singer and songwriter Lonnie Duvall, developed into a large band with several interchanging members: Jimmy Walcott (trumpet), Greer Whitacre (saxophone, rhythm guitar, harmonica, and back-up vocals), Ronnie Sinkey (drums), Jimmy Parkerson (organ and saxophone), Jerry Brown (lead guitar), and Donnie Brown (bass guitar).} It took only a couple of months for Duvall to cultivate his remarkable chemistry with the Candy Shoestring. By developing an attractive new sound, the group managed to shock the audience during a “Battle of the Bands” at the American Legion Home, which secured a decisive victory.\footnote{Lonnie Duvall and the Candy Shoestring, for example, provided the music at a banquet and dance sponsored by the Phi Kappa Tau fraternity from DSC at the Downtowner Motor Inn in Greenville; see, “Patterson and Wife Honored Here,” \textit{DDT}, Mar 25, 1968, p.5.} The band remained in demand at “hippie” dances, parties, and clubs in the Delta, but the Shoestring also traveled to perform at venues on the Gulf Coast.\footnote{A “cigar-chomping, somewhat portly” musician and entertainment lawyer named Seymour Rosenberg signed Lonnie Duvall in mid-1960s to Hip Records, a pop subsidiary of Stax Records, which rarely got rhythm and blues songs on white radio, because many of them were simply “too black.” As one executive put it, Hip “was a sorry effort” to get pop airplay with white artists. Only a few of the artists on Hip were ever heard outside of the mid-South. Lonnie Duvall was an incredible talent, in the opinion of Greenville-native Jim Veal, but unscrupulous people in the record business robbed him of what might have been a successful career. Some of his original compositions were stolen by other artists, which deeply disturbed Duvall, who eventually took his own life; see, Rob Bowman, \textit{Soulsville U.S.A.: The Story of Stax Records} (New York: Schirmer Trade Books, 1997), 108-109; Jim Veal, blog post, May 18, 2008, \url{http://crudcrud.blogspot.com/2008/05/cigarettes.html}.} By all accounts, Duvall was an exceptional songwriter, and the band recorded some of his original music at a recording studio in Memphis. The four songs were never released to the public, perhaps due to the songwriter’s exit from the group after a month-long stint gigging in Dallas during the summer of 1968.\footnote{“Battle of the Bands,” \textit{DDT}, Dec 22, 1967, p.3.} Duvall’s sudden exit caused several other members to bolt the Candy Shoestring, which, down to a three-piece, placed a great deal of pressure on the group’s de-facto new frontman, Jerry Brown.

Starting in the mid-1960s, the band often practiced in the back room of the Delish Shop. Over time, their rehearsals gave rise to complaints from patrons of the restaurant. “We’d gotten to where we weren’t just a little garage band,” Donnie Brown remembered, “We’d gotten bigger
and louder and my mother ran us out of the Delish Shop, because it was affecting [business in] the restaurant and the dining room.”

To secure another rehearsal space for the band, Agnes Brown called upon friend and local sculptor Leon Koury, who at one time operated a club called the Orbit Lounge, which sat vacant across from Doe’s Steak House. With a particular eye for artistic talent, he decided to let the band rehearse in the abandoned nightclub. The renowned sculptor was a mentor who not only encouraged many young visual artists but also provided the precious space that Jerry Brown required to augment the band’s repertoire and rehearse in his new role as lead singer. According to one historian, Koury was driven in his charge to identify talent and “fan it into a flame.”

Koury was an avid protégé of lawyer and poet William Alexander Percy, who headed the Relief Committee in Greenville during the Great Flood and wrote *Lanterns on the Levee: Recollections of a Planter’s Son*. The son of United States Senator LeRoy Percy, Will played an important role in the life of the budding artist in the 1930s. Koury’s early sculptures—one bust of a young black girl who patronized his parents’ grocery store on Nelson Street; the other the tortured head of Christ—so impressed the cosmopolitan southern author that he took pictures of them to artist Malvina Hoffman, who, believing that Koury possessed the “quality of genius,” invited him to study with her in New York. He ended up living in New York during the 1950s, earning a positive reputation as an artist, but after the passing of his mother in October 1961, he returned home to take care of his father.

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410 Malvina Hoffman created the six-foot tall bronze memorial to Senator Leroy Percy called the Patriot, which sits atop the Percy plot in Greenville Cemetery; Ben Wasson, “The Time Has Come,” *DDT*, May 13, 1962, p.20.
Koury did not follow in his father’s footsteps and take over the grocery store. “I had enough of grocery stores for all of my childhood,” Koury stated. “I was always a maverick…so I decided to open a bar.” Koury was also not too eager to resume his career as an artist, so he transformed his father’s grocery store at 426 Nelson Street into a nightclub called the Orbit Lounge. He envisioned the club as “the kind of place where creative people could come together, talk, socialize, listen to good music and exchange ideas.” Koury, in fact, lived in a house attached to the club. “It was a big ole house that was turned into a club,” recalled Donnie Brown, “The bottom part was the club,” and it led “up into his house.”

His personal engagement and financial investment in the social landscape caught the attention of several art enthusiasts in Greenville, who quickly “swooped down” and encouraged the artist to resume his career. Having sold his first sculpture to Lady Carnavon, of England, who paid one hundred pounds to add the bust to her husband’s collection, he used the commission to purchase the lot adjacent to his father’s grocery store. In late 1962, with the help of local artist Elizabeth Calvert, Koury built an art school behind the Orbit Lounge. Koury had provided art instruction for several talented local youths, including Jerry and Donnie Brown. Though he eventually took out small ads in the local newspaper, inviting patrons to come drink beer and eat pizza and sandwiches, the club developed a certain stigma within a few

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416 Elizabeth Calvert was born in Greenville in 1921, and she studied art at Newcomb College in New Orleans and at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Returning to the Delta after World War II, she established an art studio with another local artist, Doris Karsell, with whom she collaborated to produce several large panels depicting the history of the Natchez Trace. Calvert’s work was mainly “representational,” and it invoked the “color planes of the cubists” as well as the “geometry of the precisionists.” Though she spent most of her life in Greenville, she died in Memphis in 1977; see, Patti Carr Black, Art in Mississippi: 1720-1980 (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 248-249; DDT, Nov 7, 1962, p.7.
Like Percy, Koury was a homosexual, and the Orbit Lounge earned the reputation of being, what Koury described as, “a ‘fruit bowl’ and all kinds of crazy stuff.” He decided to “shut it up” after only a few years. Despite its brief existence, historian Ben Wise argues, in William Alexander Percy: The Curious Life of a Mississippi Planter and Sexual Freethinker, the Orbit Lounge reflected “the kind of open-minded artistic community that existed in Greenville.”

Koury’s 1964 bust of William Faulkner earned him even more notoriety—enough to be featured in advertisements for Chesterfield cigarettes in Time and Life magazines. His most famous work, a sculpture of a compress worker, resided at the Brooks Museum in Memphis. Yet, he remained connected to the Queen City, where his works decorated the patios of parlors of several homes and his busts immortalized in bronze more than one generation of some of the more prominent families. In the mid-1960s, Koury committed himself—much like his mentor—to the idea that “pedagogical relationships” were nourishing both a spiritual and artistic sense. Though Percy had not taught him how to sculpt, he had encouraged him how to express himself as an artist—an ethic Koury reproduced in his relationships with a host of curious and talented youths in Greenville. In a later article, Koury described his role as a mentor to local youths:

Kids were experimenting with everything—there was rock and roll, you see, and bands were shooting up all over town. The kids had no place to practice their loud music and I had this empty building here because I had gone out of the bar business. They wanted to know if they could practice here and that’s how I

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423 Irene Cooper, “Pen, Chisel, and Brush,” NOTP, Aug 1, 1937, p.32.
became intimate with these kids who were typical of the period when they began to experiment with drugs and all sorts of things—acid, grass or whatever they could find. I pretended to be an addict myself to win their trust and I tried to help them understand what was happening to them and to the world. That’s how I became a sort of mentor—or even a guru of sorts—to the young people in the area.\footnote{Lynn Lafoe, “Leon Koury is Recognized,” \textit{DDT}, May 25, 1992, p.7.}

One of his young protégés, renowned sculptor Bill Beckwith, explained that he exposed him to “the same quality of art that Will Percy had exposed to him [and] he consistently urged a bunch of searching young bohemians to read the Harvard Classics.” Another student referred to Koury as a “mystic thinker,” who “made you figure out what you wanted by leading you inward.”\footnote{Quoted in Benjamin E. Wise, \textit{William Alexander Percy: The Curious Life of a Mississippi Planter and Sexual Freethinker} (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 341.}

He was certainly a “character,” according to bassist Donnie Brown, who “learned about UFOs from him” and his stack of “crazy magazines.”\footnote{Donnie Brown, telephone interview by T. DeWayne Moore, June 4, 2014, Greenville, Mississippi.}

Koury never taught them much about musicianship, but he provided the young artists with room to build up their confidence, hone their respective crafts, and develop some chemistry with drummer Thomas “Boogie” Hobart.\footnote{Many bands in Greenville had serious trouble finding a place to practice, see “The Cellar Produces Sounds of the Present,” \textit{DDT}, Jan 28, 1968, p.19.}

While other rock bands in the Delta had trouble finding a suitable place for rehearsal, the Candy Shoestring enjoyed almost unrestricted use of the vacant Orbit Lounge, which proved a safe and reliable practice space for several years.\footnote{The Reets, a band out of Cleveland, “were ousted by town officials” from a vacant building in Merigold due to complaints that practice sessions “were disturbing the peace.” Donnie Brown recalled, “I know we disturbed Doe’s a little bit,” because all sorts of local people tried to attend their practice sessions. Koury, however, did not want the band to throw parties. “Everybody wanted to get in the place,” Donnie Brown explained, “but we wouldn’t let ‘em in there, because he didn’t want us to have a party going on. He wanted us to use it for rehearsal”; see, Donnie Brown, telephone interview by T. DeWayne Moore, June 4, 2014, Greenville, Mississippi; see also, Laura Cefalu and Pic Firmin, “Hard Times for Hard Rock in Delta,” \textit{DDT}, March 22, 1970, p.15.}

The dearth of viable steady bookings in Greenville at the end of the 1960s was the result of resilient local fears concerning the “hippie invasion” and racially-integrated social functions.
The Candy Shoestring encouraged all people, black and white, to attend their jam sessions at the old Teen Center behind the police station on Main Street.⁴²⁹. “We don’t care who comes to the dances,” stated Jerry Brown, “but apparently somebody else does.” Due to his support for integrated social functions, some folks were hesitant to hire the group. The Shoestring also lacked “steady bookings” due to its “hippie” image. Jerry Brown wore his hair in a “natural” manner, similar to the “Afro” style. Long hair may have been good for the kids, but the adults in the Delta simply could not “stand it.”⁴³⁰ The Candy Shoestring continued to book the occasional local show, but they also started to look for opportunities elsewhere.

In the summer of 1970, the Candy Shoestring traveled to southern Florida and delivered several performances at clubs and other venues in Fort Lauderdale and Miami. It was during this time that Jerry and Donnie Brown started to add theatrics to their shows. In homage to Jimi Hendrix’s performance at the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival, Jerry learned how to play solos with his teeth. Following the bold performance of the Candy Shoestring at historic Grinnell’s Park in Miami, which delighted several thousand people, the band beamed with positive energy and nailed a festival audition at the Flying Machine, a club in Fort Lauderdale. The Candy Shoestring was on the bill for the upcoming 1970 Atlanta Pop Festival, or what became known as “Woodstock South.”⁴³¹

Donnie Brown and Bud Cockrell, along with as many as 35,000 other music lovers, attended the 1969 New Orleans Pop Festival. Thus, Brown believed he knew what Atlanta was going to be like. The promoters were prepared to handle over 100,000 people, but the eventual arrival of as many as 400,000 people in Atlanta led to traffic jams, gatecrashing, and full-blown

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pandemonium at times. “I went up in a chopper and you could see the traffic-jam for some
twenty miles away,” promoter Alex Cooley explained, “It was a great shock to me.”

Donnie Brown remembered all the lines of cars blocking the road to the Atlanta Pop Festival, people
walking down the street in the nude, and how the pushers setup tables and made signs
advertising a menagerie of “whatever kind of drugs you wanted.” He also recalled folks passing
around cups of “electric Kool-Aid,” giving it to thirsty friends without warning them. We were
“lucky we didn’t drink that stuff,” Brown asserted, “They were tripping like crazy.”

He heard people screaming bloody murder from backstage; one concertgoer climbed a forty-foot high
scaffold and fell to the ground, but the sound of ambulance sirens revealed that more than a few
people overdosed that evening and ended up in the hospital.

Lots of folks from Greenville made the trip to Atlanta, as did Kudzu festival connoisseur
David Doggett, who had recently been beaten and jailed at a festival in Louisiana. The music
was the best: B.B. King, the Allman Brothers Band, Mountain, and Jimi Hendrix. “The people
were great” too, Doggett declared, “I wandered for a whole day without seeing a single person I
had ever met before and yet I felt like I was among a warm group of old friends.” The Candy
Shoestring played two days at the free stage in the camping area. In fact, they “made such a hit
at the free stage that they were invited to play on the main stage Saturday morning after Goose
Creek Symphony, “one of the baddest” bluegrass bands in the late-1960s. Jerry played with
his teeth for the first time live at Atlanta, and Donnie fell to his knees while playing bass. Since
the sound system was too small to accommodate a crowd of 400,000 people, the promoters
rented the Brown’s PA system for fifty bucks a night.

After the breakout performance at the Atlanta Pop Festival, the Candy Shoestring returned to Florida. For the next eight weeks, Jerry Brown recalled, the band played “almost every night.” The changing of the seasons, however, brought the wayward rock musicians home. Even though their manager wanted them to travel for an extended engagement in West Palm Beach, the Shoestring decided to return to Greenville in the fall, not only because the drummer was still in high school but also because they were a little “burnt out.”  

The band’s exciting summer, however, had opened doors to a host of new opportunities. Jerry Brown, in an interview shortly after their return, stated that the band hoped to release an album on Warner Brothers Records, which, in his opinion, was “looking for a Mississippi group.” The Shoestring had also attracted the interest of the producer of Cream, who requested tapes and photographs of the groups’ stage performances in Atlanta. Jerry Brown also wanted to audition at Fillmore Auditorium, a rock venue in San Francisco, California. “That’s where a lot of good groups got started,” he stated, and “if we could get in there, it would be great.” Donnie Brown forwarded a much simpler imperative. “We’ve got to get out of the South,” he exclaimed, “because it’s going to take a long time for people to accept the deeper, more advanced music that’s already gotten to half of the country.”  

Though the band was more interested in writing and concerts than playing club gigs, the band nevertheless enjoyed a few engagements upon their return at Al’s Supper Club, down Highway 82 East from a neighborhood store called A&K Grocery.  

The local performances, as well as the band’s growing notoriety, inspired one local teenager to organize the first major music festival in the rural, flat fields of the Mississippi Delta.

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Bobby Thompson, an eighteen-year-old whose mother operated A&K Grocery, was the first person to suggest staging a rock festival in Greenville. In fact, he had been thinking about it all summer long. It was not until the return of the Shoestring that Thompson believed he had the final, crucial element for such a celebration—talent. He approached the band after a performance at Al’s Supper Club in mid-September, and he convinced them to headline what he called an “open air concert” in a large field behind the grocery store. Located across the street, the festival site featured “eight big acres” in which to “frolic” and listen to music. Thompson was not a professional concert promoter, but he designated enough parking spaces for about 150 vehicles, which left about four acres for folks to spread out and enjoy the music, and A&K Grocery planned to sell soft drinks and sandwiches from Brown’s Delish Shop. To cover expenses for the lights and other electrical equipment, the promoters planned to charge an admission fee of one dollar. In its infancy, the whole affair seemed quite innocent.

Hoping to attract as many as one thousand people, the promoters sent posters to college campuses in Memphis, Jackson, and “all over the Delta,” and publicized the “open air concert” in the September 1970 issue of *Kudzu*, an underground newspaper published by white members of the Southern Student Organizing Committee (SSOC) in Jackson. By gaining the support of SSOC and the *Kudzu*, Thompson and the Candy Shoestring received almost instant notoriety throughout the state. The young promoters of rock music were not quite cut out to attract the attention of the fledgling Mississippi Sovereignty Commission (MSC); though on its last legs in the early 1970s, the MSC struggled forward in its watchdog role to keep subversive, outside elements from undermining the “way of life” in the South. The “open air concert” in the Delta did awaken a sleeping giant, one which remained fit and ready for a potential invasion—not of

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Communists from Cuba—but of naturalists, nudists, drug addicts, and hippies from all across the country. The maintenance of “law and order” in the Queen City came to consume the minds of an active and intimidating group of fundamentalists.

Thompson, from the beginning, had demonstrated his intentions to put on a lawful and “peaceful” concert, going so far as to seek the advice and consent of local law enforcement. Deputy sheriff Albert Tackett believed the open air festival “would probably be a good idea—that it would keep all the kids out of the honkytonks.” Though he did not “know of any law against it,” he acknowledged the possibility of noise complaints from a nearby housing development on St. Christopher Road. “If they get too loud and we get some complaints,” Tackett insisted, “we’ll have to slow it down.” If any violence erupted, he promised to “close it down.” As long as no one blocked the roads and everyone conducted themselves orderly, Tackett concluded, “it would be all right.” Thompson had not only gone through all the proper channels, he also received the positive endorsement of the sheriff’s department, which suggested that “weather” was “the only thing that could” stop the music festival. “I don’t think there’ll be any problem,” Shoestring bassist Donnie Brown assured, pausing for a moment to add, “—not in the Delta.”440

A host of problems arose on September 20, 1970, when the front page of the DDT announced: “There was Woodstock. There was Thunderbird Beach. There was Atlanta. And now there is Greenville?” Even though the headline questioned the ability of local promoters to organize an event similar to the major “rock festivals,” such as the Atlanta Pop Festival and Thunderbird Beach in Louisiana—each of which featured a plethora of hallucinogens, rock music, and undercover police officers—the opening lines awoke the underlying fears in the

hearts of many concerned citizens in Washington County. Though the succinct article of staff
writer Barry Farr depicted the promoters as passionate, hard-working, and well-organized, it also
associated the “open air festival” with such extravaganzas as Woodstock and the Atlanta Pop
Festival, which conjured visions of Greenville “littered with filth” and overrun with hordes of
“unwashed, unblessed, unemployed, untalented and almost unhuman hippies.”

The concerns of local fundamentalist churches was reflected in a public forum article titled “Categorizing the
Hippies,” in which one local critic described the scene at a televised rock festival “held on one of
the beautiful country sides” in the North. “After one day of the festival,” he insisted, the
landscape was no longer beautiful. In addition to garbage and other “filth,” the bodies of
naturalists, music lovers, addicts, and hippies scattered the grounds, littering the once stunning
landscape “like rotten driftwood.” The unidentified film critic attributed the debauched state of
affairs at the festival to the drug pushers—no doubt important brokers in the rock festival
experience—who were indeed “doing a brisk business.”

The announcement of a potential countercultural invasion prompted an immediate, multi-
faceted response from the people who lived and attended church near the festival site. Their
mission was to stop the festival from happening at all costs. Pastor John Chittom, of the nearby
Glendale Baptist Church, spoke out against the “open air concert” on radio station WDDT, and
several members of his congregation certainly made their displeasure known by threatening to
call a boycott on the A&K Grocery. The concomitant deployment of public protest and
economic intimidation, despite sending a powerful and compelling message to both sponsors and
promoters, was insufficient for one group of local dissidents, who needed to make an impression

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442 Ibid.
on a more personal level.444 “They started threatening us and threatening him [Thompson],” Shoestring bassist Donnie Brown recalled, “Talk about some southern rednecks calling themselves Christians and threatening your life.” After performing one evening at Al’s Supper Club, the Shoestring came outside to find an ominous warning stuck to the side of the band’s vehicle. The sticker read: “The Eyes of the Ku Klux Klan Are Watching You.”

“The worst part of it was, of course, that my mom owned the restaurant,” recalled Beki Brown, the only daughter of Agnes Brown, “and people knew us very well.” The members of the Shoestring quickly became aware of how well known they were in town. “There was a lot of good ole boys who used to hang out” in the bar at Brown’s Delish Shop, and “I’m talking real good ole boys, classic Mississippi good ole boys, [who] decided that they didn’t want the festival to happen.” 445 Jerry and Donnie Brown, by all accounts, did not do drugs, drink, or smoke while growing up or as young adults.446 In fact, they enjoyed a cordial relationship with the “rednecks” who patronized the Delish Shop, that is, until they grew out their hair.447 Their one-time music teacher, Bud Roden, started to call Jerry Brown the “Wildman,” because he grew an “Afro.” As one writer for the DDT noticed, the young, white members of the counterculture in Greenville were “not really” hippies, “but rather Mississippi’s answer to the movement.” Several local musicians did “not fit the categories of hippies,” but they certainly projected a similar image with their “hippie appearance.”448 The announcement of the festival increased the local spotlight and animus towards “hippies,” and rumors quickly spread that the Klan planned to

446 Jim Veal, personal discussion, January 17, 2016.
448 Paul Jeschke, “Haight-Ashbury’s Hippies: Have They Turned On or Dropped Out,” DDT, Aug 27, 1967, p.3.
fly over the gathering and spray poison. “That freaked us all out,” Beki Brown asserted, “We knew about the KKK, but we didn’t know it was really active” around Greenville.\footnote{Beki Brown Morgan, telephone interview by T. DeWayne Moore, August 2, 2014.}

Washington County, though not a hotbed of Klan activity, certainly boasted its fair share of white supremacists, several of whom proved their willingness over the years to preserve racial hierarchies through violence and intimidation. Much like the “pseudo-hippie underground,” which hid in plain sight at universities and larger cities, white Deltans who continued to believe in white supremacy were not hiding at all. One of the most public and prominent white supremacists was a local pilot named “Eaglerock” Joe Ours. He worked as a crop duster and hosted a number of white supremacist meetings at his air strip in the late 1960s.\footnote{“White Supremacist Group Plans Rally East of Greenville,” \textit{DDT}, May 12, 1966, p.1.} Over three thousand people attended one meeting of the United Klans of America in the late summer of 1966 to hear Imperial Wizard Robert Shelton, who warned about the infiltration of American institutions by subversive forces.\footnote{“3,000 Attend Klan Rally,” \textit{DDT}, Aug 11, 1966, p.1.} Later that evening, two young men who had attended the UKA rally “just to hear what they had to say,” called the Imperial Wizard in his hotel room, asked a few questions, and received another earful of the same anti-Communist rhetoric so reflective of Senator Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s. The “Eaglerock” of white supremacy in Washington County also offered up his air strip to the unabashed Americans for the Preservation of the White Race (APWR), which held its annual state-wide meeting and rally in August 1969. By providing an open venue for the perpetuation of white supremacy, he helped foster a resurgence of Klan activity in the Delta. In early 1969, white supremacists started having weekly meetings at a service station on Highway 82 between Greenville and Leland, where the group likely planned several subsequent cross burnings at the homes of civil rights activists in
Leland. Considering that Ours not only worked as a crop duster, but that he also performed in the air shows of the Confederate Air Force, the rumors of an aerial poisoning might not have been an idle threat. Beki Brown did not know just how close she and her brothers were to getting sprayed with DDT and any other noxious mixture of pesticidinal pollutants that were developed to control the agricultural environment in the 1960s.

The psychological impact of continual threats of white supremacist violence, along with vocal protests and the threat of boycott, proved an effective strategy for the anti-rock campaign. Bobby Thompson soon rescinded his offer to host the festival, and he was noticeably shaken about the ordeal when he informed the Shoestring. According to Donnie Brown, Thompson explained, “I can’t do it, man, I can’t do it. Just do it somewhere else. I can’t do it out here.”

Without the support of the A&K Grocery, Jerry Brown took control and attempted to move the festival to the Stardust Lounge on Highway 82. Negotiations fell apart and they tried to rent the old Drive-In Movie Theatre down the road, but the growing public outcry against the festival assured them no sympathetic venues in Greenville.

In a last ditch effort to obtain an alternative site, Jerry Brown scheduled a meeting with the city council and the mayor. Since he could find no private business to host the event, he wanted to request the use of city property. The majority of city and county officials much to his dismay, remained hesitant to endorse or condone any large outdoor concerts. Washington County Sheriff J.R. Cloy, who had earlier offered his tentative support, acknowledged “the trouble they’ve had at other places.” If the promoters held a simple musical exhibition and concertgoers behaved themselves, Cloy argued, “I’d be all for it.” If they planned on getting

nude, going swimming, and smoking dope, the sheriff did not “want to be a part of it.”

Greenville police chief Bill Burnley realized that the “open air concert” had become a very “controversial” topic in Greenville, and the “general public, by and large,” was “against this type of thing.” Even though no law existed prohibiting such a gathering in a city park, Burnley argued that “violations would occur” as a result of the festival, specifically the trafficking and distribution of narcotics. Citing the heavy drug use at Woodstock, he warned against inviting large crowds of outsiders into the community.455 “From what I have heard and seen from the news media regarding rock festivals,” the police chief concluded, “Greenville doesn’t need one.”456 With its advisors standing “strictly opposed” to the event, the city council decided that “under no circumstances” would they allow a rock concert on city property.457 Unable to locate a venue, Jerry Brown reluctantly announced the cancellation of the “open air concert” and expressed little optimism about the future of rock music in the Delta.458

The decision of the city council evoked a quick response from several disapproving citizens in the local press. One of the most prominent detractors was Hodding Carter III, who, in one editorial, announced with much shame that the “anti-youth war” had come to Washington County, as “lawmen, neighbors, church members, and the general public jumped into the righteous indignation, moral outrage act,” acting as if “original sin, plus all its refinements, was being introduced to the Garden of Eden.” John G. Walker, a young army private (as well as musician) from Greenville, also lampooned the “great civic-minded ‘little’ majority” who believed it a “sin against God” and attracted “sin, drugs, [and] riots by those terrible people [into]
our nice little town.”459 The city of Greenville, after all, was no untainted bantustan of conservatism and morality. The bookmakers on Washington Avenue, the crap shooters along the highway, and the patrons of rural barrelhouses had long benefitted from the “permissive attitude” in the Queen City.460 Several locals believed that all the outspoken, “pious folk” were “hypocrites” for protesting the festival while tolerating numerous forms of vice.461

The city’s lack of interest in its young people proved most disturbing to some outspoken Greenvillians. Even though the law placed age restrictions on patronage at certain adult establishments, local youths often indulged in such activities—despite their illegality—largely because there was “nothing else to do” in Greenville. Other than football games, horseshows, stock car races and parades, the city did not have much of anything for teenagers. In another letter to the editor, army private John G. Walker complained that the youth in his hometown had practically nothing to do that was exciting and lawful, other than go to the movies or drive around town. He pleaded with the “civic-minded people” to “wake up” and “help the youth find excitement that is lawful” in Greenville. Many of his friends had planned to attend the rock festival sponsored by the Candy Shoestring, which, in his opinion, “would have been a great success” and “helped the youth and townspeople of Greenville.” Instead of the local youths spending an evening listening to music there was no telling “what they did instead.”462 One local woman listed some ideas about the possible activities of young people looking to have a “fun evening” in the Delta:

1- Organize a Youth for KKK!

461 Sharron Fisher Zoeller, of Greenville, in a letter to the editor, chastised all the “pious folk who did not see fit” to support the festival. By “contacting the proper authorities” and “asking for suggestions,” she asserted, the promoters “certainly went about it the right way” and “should have at least been given a chance”; see Sharron Fisher Zoeller, “Who Needs Festivals,” letter to the editor, DDT, Sep 27, 1970, p.4; Cindy Bransome, letter to the editor, “Festival Needed,” DDT, Sep 25, 1970, p.4.
2- Pickup some beer and go watch a “dirty movie or a pornographic book”
3- Head east on Highway 82 and visit one of the local jukes, which feature shooting, beatings, gambling, and stabbings on a nightly basis.
4- Head down to Theobald Street for a “little—paid—free love.”

Jerry Brown was perhaps the most bitter about the community’s general lack of interest in the social activities of its young people. He believed the music festival a positive addition to the cultural and social landscape in the mid-Delta. “We were really working for something for Greenville,” Brown lamented, “We thought we could really start something” good to keep local youths from turning to drugs or alcohol. In line with the comments of John Walker, he also called on the civic-minded in Greenville to “start thinking about some kind of city civic center” or at least a “decent night club for kids, a place without beer.”

Though he blamed the Delta Democrat Times for sparking the protests, Jerry Brown also recognized the ability of local media to construct a more positive image of the local rock festival. “Everybody has a picture of LSD,” he complained, and “it wouldn’t have been this way if the paper hadn’t said ‘rock festival comes to Greenville.’” Thompson and Brown “had in mind simply an open air concert” for about a thousand people, but the article of Barry Farr made it sound like the event would attract people from all over the region, “hundreds of thousands of kids, ‘lawbreakers.’” To combat the negative cultural stereotypes about rock festivals, Brown

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463 Sharron Fisher Zoeller, of Greenville, in a letter to the editor, chastised all the “pious folk who did not see fit” to support the festival. By “contacting the proper authorities” and “asking for suggestions,” she asserted, the promoters “certainly went about it the right way” and “should have at least been given a chance”; see Sharron Fisher Zoeller, “Who Needs Festivals,” letter to the editor, DDT, Sep 27, 1970, p.4; Cindy Bransome, letter to the editor, “Festival Needed,” DDT, Sep 25, 1970, p.4.
466 Ibid.
moved to organize a “much smaller” rock concert on the recently landscaped shores of Lake Ferguson, an area complete with shade trees and barbecue pits, known as Schelben Park.\footnote{The city dedicated Schelben Park in honor of former mayor Fred Schelben in 1957, but only thirteen years later it had become an “eyesore in Greenville,” with rusted oil drums, broken glass, and rotted oil-covered driftwood littering the sandy beach. In the spring of 1970, the park commission cleaned it up and installed new trashcans, playground equipment, tables, grills, and an archway; see, “To Name Lakefront Recreation Area for Late Mayor Schelben,” \textit{DDT}, Dec 20, 1957, p.1; “Eyesore in Greenville,” \textit{DDT}, Mar 1, 1970, p.14; and “Park Commission Lets Summer Equipment Bid,” \textit{DDT}, Mar 3, 1970, p.8.}

Despite the lack of support in city hall, Brown reached out to family friend and Greenville Mayor Pat Dunne, who, in the 1950s, had been quite the promoter of local entertainment.\footnote{Shoestring guitarist Jerry Brown revealed after one meeting with the city council that “Mayor Dunne’s attitude was good” about the rock festival; see, “City Says ‘No’: Rock Festival Called Off,” \textit{DDT}, Sep 24, 1970, p.1.} Dunne was also a longtime friend of Agnes Brown, mother to two-thirds of the Candy Shoestring, and he enjoyed a long relationship with her children. “He loved us,” her daughter Beki recalled in one interview, “He was around when we were growing up. He went against public opinion [and] supported” the efforts of the Candy Shoestring.\footnote{Beki Brown Morgan, telephone interview by T. DeWayne Moore, August 2, 2014.} Before becoming mayor in the early 1960s, Dunne not only promoted boxing and wrestling events in an “arena” on South Walnut Street, which was often so packed “a lot of people didn’t get in,” but he also staged concerts for record producer Sam Phillips, of Sun Records.\footnote{“Girl Wrestler with Curtis for Saturday’s Match,” \textit{DDT}, Nov 3, 1955, p.9; “Arkansas and State Young Battlers Clash,” \textit{DDT}, Dec 5, 1955, p.9.} In early summer 1956, for example, Dunne promoted a two-hour Rock ‘N Roll Jamboree at the Greenville High School Auditorium, featuring Johnny Cash, Roy Orbison, and Eddie Bond.\footnote{“Greenville Will Rock and Roll at GHS Tonight at 8,” \textit{DDT}, June 5, 1956, p.2.} He faced harsh criticisms as a promoter of rock ‘n roll concerts in the 1950s, which perhaps allowed him to empathize with the young promoters and offer his tacit support for a scaled-down version of the “open air festival” at the city park. “It’s innocent, [just] a bunch of kids hanging out,” he reasoned, according to Beki Brown, “If we take care of it [and] support it, it’s going to be okay.”\footnote{Beki Brown Morgan, telephone interview by T. DeWayne Moore, August 2, 2014.}
Thanks to the support of the mayor, an estimated crowd of two hundred and fifty “long-haired, bearded and hip-looking youths” as well as straight-laced youngsters gathered at the small park on the afternoon of Saturday, September 26 to hear the Candy Shoestring “belt out a long succession of popular songs,” only a hundred yards from the downtown area. Even with amplified noise blaring through the city streets, one staff writer for the DDT reported that the whole scene was “quite placid.” Hodding Carter III noticed that the concert attracted not only young people, but it also brought together adults with children, children with children, long-hairs and short-hairs, blacks and whites, police and hippies—all of whom got along just fine, “sitting or lying on the grass, playing in the swings or just sitting in their cars on the levee top listening to the music.”

Local police, by all accounts, had no trouble with the crowd and spent most of their time either controlling traffic or protecting the stage equipment. “Everything went great,” Jerry Brown exclaimed, “The kids even picked up the paper and the trash.”

Hodding Carter III believed that the “pleasant interlude” on the banks of the Lake Ferguson went a long way towards “proving a point.” The benign, relaxed atmosphere of the concert, indeed, demonstrated that not all concerts centered on rock music necessarily posed a threat to the community. Even though scores of Greenvillians avoided the downtown area on Saturday, most folks failed to notice the rock performance, DDT staff writer Bill Rose the following day informed, “Surprise! Greenville had a rock festival Saturday,” and he emphasized that the city had not been overrun by drug pushers and hippies. The “placid,” incident-free gathering substantiated what Jerry Brown had “been saying all along,” that local concerts would

475 In one editorial, Hodding Carter III argues that the Schelben Park concert demonstrated to Greenville that rock concerts did not necessarily pose as a threat to the city; see, Hodding Carter III, “Proving a Point,” DDT, Sep 28, 1970, p.4.
not be “wide-open” like in Atlanta. Unlike “open air concerts” at Woodstock and the urban South, he argued, festivals in the Delta would feature “no open drug use, no scores of kids high on marijuana, no nude hippies, [and] no arrests.” Jerry Brown declared, “This is just what we wanted...to show people” it could be done “without any trouble.”

**MIKE WARD, MIXONVILLE, AND THE DELTA FESTIVAL**

Despite positive local press coverage touting the “great cooperation” between the promoters, the audience, and local police, the majority of local officials and religious groups continued to oppose the future staging of rock festivals. Several letters to the editor reveal the opposition of local church members. Glynn R. Powell, the pious wife of a local civil engineer, for example, believed that God had “intervened and prevented” the “open air concert” behind A&K Grocery. The city of Greenville, she argued, even with all its shortcomings, remained a “wonderful place” and did not need a rock festival such as Woodstock. Having visited the infamous Haight-Ashbury section of San Francisco and “cried for days over the heartache of sin and filth,” she denounced the type of countercultural activity that Jerry Brown “or any other like him has to offer.” Powell believed it her duty as a “red-blooded American and Christian,” to instruct and—above all—protect impressionable young people “from such things as the so-called festival.”

The church groups responded differently to the alleged lack of entertainment for young people. Glynn Powell simply denied it, declaring that Jerry Brown knew “nothing about things

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477 Ibid.
of real value”; in her opinion, teenagers had “more to do” than they had “hours in a day to do,” citing all the church, school, and family-related chores and activities that she no doubt toiled over in the past. The young members of Temple Baptist Church, while recognizing their responsibilities to the church as well as the elderly, poor, and needy, believed the city needed to offer a wider variety of entertainment to young people. Citing the Bible, 1st Thessalonians 5:22, which advises Christians “to shun the very appearance of evil,” the Temple Youth nevertheless took a strong position “against the Rock Festival, or Open-Air Concert,” pledging to do their “best to prevent any in the future” and calling on young people to join “in the battle to rid our community of this filth.”

Pastor John Chittom, of Glendale Baptist Church, who had railed against the rock festival on the radio, accepted the challenge of organizing wholesome, family-friendly events. In addition to holding a revival meeting, he invited a “folk choir” from Jackson to perform at the church. The forty-member youth choir utilized guitars, drums, and horns in its forty-five minute “musical presentation for witnessing youths.” To young folks considering attending the festival, Glynn Powell suggested heading to Baton Rouge for the Billy Graham Crusade later in October, as it promised to offer what they had “been searching for—The Lord Jesus Christ and His Will for your life.”

The popular evangelist might have in fact accepted an invitation to the Delta Festival; after all, Graham believed that large music festivals were excellent conduits to reach the youth of America. Appearing at the 1969 Miami Pop Festival, he raved about the “terrific music” and

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479 Ibid.
advised the crowd to “get high on Jesus.” Not only was the religious discourse against the rock festival out of step with the ministry of Graham, it also did not sit well with many young folks in Greenville. John Walker, an army private, believed—in line with Graham—that the Delta Festival “would bring a lot of young adults together, not only to listen to music but to exchange ideas…about God, politics, and people in general.” He flatly refuted the claims of Chittom and Powell—that divine intervention stopped the rock festival. In the young soldier’s opinion, the religious justification of the anti-rock movement was “utterly absurd.”

The vehement protests against the “open air concert,” veiled death threats against the promoters, and lack of support from local officials, proved too disturbing for the much-maligned members of the Candy Shoestring, which abandoned its promotional efforts. Following an erroneous report that the group planned to follow up with a larger music event, Jerry Brown made it clear that the band was not “doing anything.” He disassociated the group from any future effort at concert promotion, citing a need to focus on their music. Brown announced that the band did not want to be “mentioned with anything like this right now.”

Officially scaling back its involvement, the Shoestring stepped aside and opened to door for a small coterie of friends and supporters, who refused to let the anti-rock sentiments win over in Greenville. The group of local rock enthusiasts planned to organize a larger, “statewide thing with about one or two thousand people.” In the opinion of the group spokesman, they

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486 Beki Brown Morgan recalled how much the protest upset her brother Jerry Brown, who wanted to focus on his music and avoid as much criticism as possible; see, Beki Brown Morgan, telephone interview by T. DeWayne Moore, August 2, 2014; “Shoestring Erroneously…,” *DDT*, Oct 6, 1970, p.1.
487 Ward organized the 1970 Delta Festival with teenagers Jerry Bertschler, whose family owned a neighborhood grocery, and David Jones, a local guitar player.
believed that young people across the state needed “to get together and listen to some music and enjoy themselves.” In the fall of 1970, the collision of rock music and politics inspired a group of young men to thwart local opposition and secure the production of an open-air concert.

The Delta (Rock) Festival developed out the nascent experiences of twenty-year-old college dropout Michael Craig Ward. Though he hailed from Greenville, he developed an initial awareness of music at his grandparents’ home in Marks. It germinated and flowered at a record store on the banks of the Sunflower River in nearby Clarksdale, where, on Saturdays, you could purchase ten 45 rpm records for a dollar. With the help of his grandfather, Ward amassed a large record collection that contained the music of many artists on Sun Records and Chess Records.489 His musical interests further blossomed in Greenville, specifically through friendships with musicians such as Jerry and Donnie Brown, who he first saw perform at a birthday party near his home. The brothers also performed at house parties and the local teen club. Though not a musician himself, Ward was a conspicuous presence on the local music scene during his years at Greenville High School.490 In fact, as one local musician recalled, he sometimes attended live performances and recorded them on his portable tape recorder.491

It was not until he left the Delta that he got involved in politics, which says a great deal about the degree of racial separation in society before the first serious attempt at school desegregation. In fact, this sort of innocence, this lack of awareness about the negative effects of segregation, would continue to have an effect on his own actions despite his public image as perhaps the most liberal of all folks in Greenville. Sometimes it served him well when he needed courage, but sometimes it prevented him from understanding situations in which he found

489 In his early teens, Ward transitioned to long-playing records, and he donated his large collection of 45 rpm records to the Greenville Teen Center; the records ended up being glued to the ceiling as decoration.
himself. Though he went on to serve as one of the writers of very cogent grant applications for the Mississippi Action for Community Education (MACE), he made some his initial lumbering steps into politics out of sheer rebellious determination. It was also a period of awakening for Ward, who very soon became a single father and candidate for municipal office.

In 1968, Ward graduated from high school and enrolled at Mississippi State University, where he hoped to earn a degree in aerospace engineering. Like several other young high school graduates who came to Starkville, he became immersed in the socio-political and cultural environment that flourished on college campuses in the late-1960s. “There was a really wild and strange group of people there back then,” recalled Ward, including some of the folks who started the Mississippi Gay and Lesbian Alliance.492 He also remembered a vocal and enthusiastic group of activists who demonstrated against the Vietnam War at the old YMCA building on campus, which was located across from the student union. While the heightened level of political activism on campus made a deep impression on Ward, he started to lose interest in his chosen field of study.493 In late 1969, he married his high school sweetheart, dropped out of college, and moved back to Greenville to work in the data-processing department at Greenville Mills.494 Having been “immersed in politics” in Starkville, he returned home with a new awareness of the problems in the Delta. Once he started to attend the meetings of the Democratic Party in Greenville, where he met another local activist named Betty Jo Boyd, he also developed the willingness and determination to take part in finding solutions.

492 The Mississippi Gay Alliance (MGA) was founded in 1973 by a group of individuals interested “in educating the public for Human Rights for all persons without prejudice.” Incorporated in 1974, the Alliance later changed its name to the Mississippi Gay and Lesbian Alliance (MGLA); see, “Mississippi Gay Alliance: Administrative History,” Edgar Sandifer Papers, ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives, http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt296nf1rx/admin/.
Having attended music festivals in other southern locales, such as the New Orleans Pop Festival, Ward possessed only a general knowledge of music festivals. The impulse that drove his efforts developed out of a conversation with his “good buddies,” a local guitar player named David Jones and Jerry Bertschler, whose family owned a grocery store down the street in Greenville. The three friends discussed the cancellation of the festival, expressed their discontent, and simply decided, “Hell, let’s do it ourselves.”

The young promoters had to overcome several obstacles, the first of which was finding a suitable and welcoming location. In light of the economic pressure put on A&K Grocery, most venues remained unwilling to host the festival. The promoters, therefore, required a location immune from the threat of economic reprisal. While looking in the rural areas outside the city, they located a small commissary “out in the middle of nowhere,” which catered primarily to the surrounding population of black farmers. The owner of the store and the surrounding acreage was James Mixon, a black farmer and storeowner who moved from Memphis in the late-1930s and purchased forty acres of “buckshot” southeast of Greenville. Similar to many other black landowners in the Delta, he took pride in not only owning but also working his own farm. “That’s something a man can call his own,” Mixon believed, “and be right proud too.”

According to one insider, he had developed and maintained friendships with several local musicians, who sometimes performed on the front porch of the commissary, and he was “excited” about using his property to give his musician friends, such as harmonica player James

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497 Born in 1907 in Arkansas, James Mixon married his wife Velma at a small country church on Black Bayou in central Washington County in 1929, and they moved to Memphis, where he worked as a butcher in a packing company. In 1938, Mixon purchased forty acres of land near Wayside in Washington County for $7.50 an acre, and the couple built their own home; he worked as a farmer “on his own account”; see, 1940 US Census, Washington, Mississippi; Roll: T627_2076; Page: 11A; Enumeration District: 76-36; also, see John Henry, “Mixon Had a Farm and On That Farm Had a Cow,” DDT, Nov 9, 1976, p.16.
C. Taylor, an opportunity to perform on a large stage.\textsuperscript{499} Mixon also recognized the economic impetus of the festival. In hopes of bringing some additional revenue into the store, he agreed to host the rock festival in the adjacent, forty acre hayfield, where concert-goers could setup camp and stay the whole weekend. Mixon had already cut and harvested his fifteen acres of soybeans, and Johnson grass covered the remaining acreage. Since people could trample the Johnson grass and camp on it without any problems, Mixon moved forward with his plans to stock the commissary full of beer, soft drinks, sandwiches, and meat to cook and sell during the two-day music extravaganza.\textsuperscript{500}

The second obstacle was convincing bands to drive out to the middle of nowhere and perform at the festival. By using his contacts on among local musicians and advertising in the \textit{Kudzu}, an underground newspaper in Jackson, Ward managed to get the call out to regional rock bands not only across Mississippi, but also in Arkansas, Tennessee, and Louisiana.\textsuperscript{501} He did not guarantee the artists any money for their performance, but he did offer to provide them with meals. “We told them, ‘Look,’” Ward recalled, “‘we can’t promise you any money, but if you come and you play we’ll feed you.’ That was the deal.”\textsuperscript{502} In the fall of 1970, the concept of the festival as well as the controversy surrounding it was so appealing that even such a modest offer proved attractive to several bands and artists who wanted to lend their talents to the much-maligned “open air concert” in the Delta.

Having secured a location and confirmed several bookings, the central concern of the promoters was letting people know about the festival. Ward initially refused to reveal the name of the landowner, the artist lineup, and the exact location of the festival to the local press, as he

\textsuperscript{499} Beki Brown Morgan, telephone interview by T. DeWayne Moore, August 2, 2014.
\textsuperscript{502} Michael Craig Ward, interview by T. DeWayne Moore, Proud Larry’s, Oxford, Mississippi, March 29, 2013.
wanted to avoid the types of harassment and intimidation that hampered earlier efforts. One local brevity, for example, revealed only that the “much-postponed, controversial music festival, to be known as the Delta Festival,” would “definitely be held” over two days on the weekend of October 17-18. ⁵⁰³ Though the promoters distributed some handbills advertising the festival, one insider admitted the event was promoted through “word of mouth, more than anything else,” because they “didn’t want to get threatened again.” ⁵⁰⁴ One advertisement in the Kudzu, however, provided a map to the festival site as well as listed several bands on the lineup, such as the Candy Shoestring, Mississippi X of Jackson, and Ginger of Cleveland. ⁵⁰⁵ Up until a couple of days before the festival, local newspapers had made it known only that artists hailing from Greenville, Jackson, Cleveland, and Arkansas were scheduled to perform at a “yet-to-be-revealed location” ten miles south of Greenville. ⁵⁰⁶

Despite some vocal religious objections, the promoters had no intention of cancelling the Delta Festival. They heard all the rumors and received threats, but moved forward with the stubborn naiveté of youth. “They were writing letters to the editor,” Mike Ward recalled, and “we’d hear stories…about preachers praying that [we got] struck down by lightning. We just didn’t care…I mean we were nineteen, twenty years-old.” ⁵⁰⁷ Ward, Bertschler and Jones did not quite go it alone. Not only did they enjoy the public support of such notables as the mayor and Hodding Carter III, but they also benefitted from their relationships with several intelligent, outspoken young proponents of the counterculture in Mississippi. One “concerned” college student named Morris Burns, for example, who had received the Hodding Carter Award for

Creative Writing at Greenville High School, not only helped get the site ready for the festival, but also penned an honest critique of the religious condemnations against intellectuals and radicals in Mississippi.508 In one letter to the editor, he highlighted the varying personal and political motives of religious leaders in Mississippi, many of whom developed specific biblical interpretations to justify “pointless persecutions” and “pitiful, ignorant actions” that blinded “others and themselves in their own fallacies.”509 Burns and other local volunteers were determined not to let the anti-rock movement “stifle freedom simply by spitting on it.” With aspiring political activists, budding intellectuals, and prominent local liberals offering their public support to the festival, the promoters gained strength and momentum, not to mention access to much-needed resources.

The promoters also received much more than advertising support from the activists, music enthusiasts, and young journalists associated with the Kudzu, a radical organ which provided “Subterranean News from the Heart of Ole Dixie.” David Doggett, who worked with the Southern Student Organizing Committee (SSOC), founded the newspaper in 1968. Though its pages often highlighted “sex, drugs, and rock and roll,” the contributors to the Kudzu remained overtly self-conscious about politics, specifically concerning “the place of the South.”510 The newspaper featured regular columns on black heritage and culture, in an effort “to correct the misconceptions that both black and white people in Mississippi have concerning the history of black people,” and it reprinted the speeches and writings of several radical black activists, such as Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and the indomitable Malcolm X.511 Doggett was

an avid fan of blues and rock music, and he attended several outdoor pop music festivals, including the 1970 Atlanta Pop Festival. In a subsequent review, he noted the respectable and exciting performance of the Candy Shoestring, who played so well on the free stage that they earned an invitation to perform on the main stage.\textsuperscript{512} Having advertised the “open air concert” behind the A&K Grocery and followed the controversy surrounding its cancellation, Doggett was eager to attend and support the Delta Festival.

Bobby Thompson and the Shoestring had planned to charge one dollar for admission to the “open air concert” behind A&K Grocery, but the promoters of the Delta Festival decided to charge a slightly higher price. They advertised that concertgoers could purchase tickets for two dollars beforehand at the Import Shop in Greenville as well as a few record stores in Jackson, but they ended up selling the majority of tickets on site for three dollars. Even though Mike Ward told one local journalist that he did not expect to turn a profit from ticket sales, he planned to use any accrued profits to support similar events for young folks in Mississippi. More specifically, Ward wanted to support a group of young bohemians and activists in Jackson, who started a non-profit corporation, Youth Enterprises of Mississippi (YEM), to solicit the funds needed to sustain a “people’s community center” called Edge City. The center featured live rock and folk music, a “far-out light show,” films, records, and a head shop, and it was “open to the public—black and white, long hair and short, young and old.”\textsuperscript{513} Much like the Orbit Lounge on Nelson Street, which had tried to bring together like-minded people in fellowship and discussion, Edge City wanted to serve as the “local seat of government for Woodstock Nation.”\textsuperscript{514}

\textsuperscript{514} “Edge City,” \textit{Kudzu} 3:1 (September 1970): 12.
The organizing role of Dacus Haining, a native Mississippian who, after the brutal shootings at Jackson State, had led a protest march on the governor’s mansion, shaped the festival in many important ways.\textsuperscript{515} In the days leading up to the Delta Festival, his organizing experience and statewide connections proved vital. Haining managed the stage crew and other general aspects of concert production, including a “light show” that combined live music with film and strobe lights. After convincing the owners of Walker Dairy Farms, at Stoneville, into letting him borrow a flatbed trailer, he drove an old Ford F-150 truck to the outskirts of Leland, picked up the trailer, and hauled it to the store of James Mixon.\textsuperscript{516} Michael Ward, in one interview, revealed that the promoters forwarded no specific vision of the festival landscape and used the old flatbed cotton trailer with the sides removed for one simple reason: “Because that’s all we had.”\textsuperscript{517}

After arriving at the festival site with the stage in tow, Haining and stage crew built a wooden frame and sewed together four white linen bed sheets by hand, fabricating a display screen, which they mounted on top of the stage. He also brought a gas-powered generator to provide electricity for an overhead projector, similar to the ones used in many public schools at the time. One aspiring visual artist recalled that dropping different liquids on the flat screen of the projector generated a visual effect similar to that of a lava lamp. “That was a cool light show back then,” she declared, “We weren’t very technical, but it worked.”\textsuperscript{518} Having secured scaffolding and lights from the Twin City Theatre, Dacus Haining and the stage crew worked

\textsuperscript{515} Haining protested against “war, racism, student suppression, Kent State, Jackson State and Augusta.” Haining brought in attorney William Kunstler, who had recently defended H. Rap Brown among other black militants, as well as Ken Mills, a black professor at Yale, to speak at the rally during the march; see, “Panel Removal OKed,” \textit{DDT}, May 24, 1970, p.1.

\textsuperscript{516} Beki Brown Morgan, telephone interview by T. DeWayne Moore, August 2, 2014.


\textsuperscript{518} Beki Brown Morgan, telephone interview by T. DeWayne Moore, August 2, 2014.
hard to get it all setup.\textsuperscript{519} As the editor of the \textit{Kudzu} later reported, their efforts “showed nicely” once it got dark.\textsuperscript{520}

The Candy Shoestring, despite their intentions of only performing, provided most of the sound equipment for the Delta Festival. Donnie Brown recalled that the live sound business was an emergent industry in the late 1960s. At the Atlanta Pop Festival, for example, the sound engineers linked together two eight channel Shure mixers and pushed the sound from two fifteen-inch speakers and two long-fill horns. The Shoestring certainly had more speakers on stage at the Delta Festival. Before coming back from Florida, Jerry Brown purchased a Marshall guitar amplifier and two speaker enclosures, each of which contained four twelve-inch speakers (a full stack). Hobart acquired a brand new double bass Ludwig drum set. Donnie Brown adopted his brothers’ old Kustom amplifier and cabinet and created a sizable bass amp, which boasted a total of eight fifteen-inch speakers.\textsuperscript{521} To power all the sound equipment, the stage crew “cannibalized” the “little ole bitty fuse box” attached to Mixon’s store.\textsuperscript{522}

Traffic proved a problem on the first day of festival. Leaning against his patrol car, watching as cars, motorcycles, station-wagons, campers, and even a shiny black Cadillac rolled slowly down the road, one sheriff’s deputy chortled “they might just wear out Wilmot Road today.” All the vehicles headed towards a place, which some festivalgoers called “Mixonville,” a buckshot field still a bit wet from the previous weekend’s rain, and the site of the Delta Festival. Though some people pulled over and stood on the roadside, perhaps undecided about whether to stay or leave, the majority of the early arrivals were curious locals hoping to catch a

\textsuperscript{519} In 1954, Senator William Caraway suggested that dramatic-minded individuals in Leland and Greenville establish a mutual entertainment group, the Twin City Theatre Guild, which, in its first ten years, built its own theatre and became an “integral part of the civil life of the two cities”; “A Community Asset,” \textit{DDT}, June 5, 1964, p.4.
\textsuperscript{521} Donnie Brown, telephone interview by T. DeWayne Moore, June 4, 2014, Greenville, Mississippi.
\textsuperscript{522} Michael Craig Ward, interview by T. DeWayne Moore, Proud Larry’s, Oxford, Mississippi, March 29, 2013.
glimpse of the “much-debated first rock festival” in Greenville. According to DDT staff writer Penny Jenkins, the early lack of spectacle must have disappointed many of the curious onlookers, because there was no conspicuous use of hallucinogenic drugs; no great multitude of hippies running around naked through the fields; and no waft of marijuana smoke.\footnote{Penny Jenkins, “Rock Festival Attracts 300 to Soggy Field,” \textit{DDT}, Oct 18, 1970, p.1.} The festival did, however, feature a few hippie entrepreneurs, one selling beans-and-rice and another pushing handmade crafts and leather goods. In addition, several representatives of the Life Call Holy Food Shop, of Jackson, distributed leaflets and other paraphernalia, which advertised everything from “holy foods” to books on “religious consciousness, natural farming and gardening, macrobiotics, Eastern ways and physiology.” The sparse crowd that came early on Saturday afternoon, in one journalist’s opinion, lacked a real sense of “enthusiasm for music.”\footnote{Ibid.} The estimated three hundred people lounged lazily at campsites, in tents or in blankets, muttering about the size of the crowd, while other people nursed beer, sipped wine bottles, and patiently waited in front of the stage.

In spite of the initial lackluster turnout, the sheriff realized that more people would show up later in the evening. Sheriff June R. Cloy as well as four deputies, as one journalist noted, “lingered on the roadsides, occasionally peering through binoculars at the youthful crowd.” Though most of the concertgoers were young college students, the police recognized that the audience included a host of thirty-year-olds. “I don’t think there’ll be any trouble,” explained Reverend Bill Lott, a young, part-time deputy on duty at the festival, “at least I hope not anyway.”\footnote{Ibid.}
The tonal rumblings of rock music came slowly on Saturday afternoon. Ed Saffley, of the Oxford-based band Johnny Moonbeam, opened with a solo performance on acoustic guitar sometime after two o’clock. Almost immediately following his folksy introduction, the band Ginger, of Cleveland, “went straight into rock,” and, according to Doggett, seemed to get the crowd “in the mood.” Even a group of local blacks, though reluctant at first, wandered up to the stage to get a closer look, eventually shaking their heads and smiling at the music of the Delta rock band. Ginger warmed up the audience up for a “very impressive set of blues and rock” from Johnny Moonbeam, a band undoubtedly taking its name from the popular play of Joseph Golden, *Johnny Moonbeam and his Silver Arrows*, which tells the story of a young Native American who steals from the gods to help the poor, thereby proving his manhood. The band name not only reflected the prevailing spirit of civil disobedience, but it also promoted a masculinist discourse that valorized social service. As the college-based band came to the end of their set, the sun had started to sink over the flat Delta horizon.

The crowd swelled as darkness fell on Mixonville. “Lots of people crashed the gates,” Mike Ward recalled, which made accurate estimates of crowd size impossible. David Doggett, writing in the *Kudzu*, claimed that up to one thousand people showed up that evening, and “it seemed” to him “as though local juice-heads were beginning to outnumber long-hairs.” Even though Mixon had stocked his store with one hundred cases of beer, one writer for the *DDT* thought “the supply wouldn’t last through the night.” The absence of sunlight also signaled the beginning of the colored lights show as well as the headlining performance of the Candy Shoestring, which, according to one Jackson activist and music enthusiast, sounded “better than

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526 Ibid.
ever” after a stint of successful gigs in Florida. The three-piece band brought the crowd to its feet with a popular rendition of “Fried Hockey Boogie,” on which Jerry Brown played a guitar solo with his teeth.530

The subsequent performance by Rubber Onis Fiasco, a Millsaps College band that refused to play cover songs, failed to “turn the crowd on,” and it started to rain during the unexceptional performance. “It wasn’t a heavy rain,” one attendee recalled, “just a drizzle,” but it signaled a violent eruption in the displeased audience.531 As Rubber Onis Fiasco concluded its unfamiliar set of songs, one unidentified man pulled a knife and stabbed a young man named Ricky Herndon, who later admitted the first round of the disagreement started at a local bar.532 “While the crowd was distracted by the incident,” several bikers started fights with “long-hairs at the stage,” which prompted the stage crew to turn on the floodlights. The rain, the stabbing, and the presence of a bunch of aggressive “juiceheads” impelled the sheriff and promoters to shut down the Delta Festival, at least for the night.

On Sunday morning, as the sun began to rise, Mike Ward hooked up a reel-to-reel tape deck and played his recently-acquired copy of Santana’s Abraxas. In upwards of two hundred people who camped over the weekend at Mixonville heard “Black Magic Woman” for the first time over the loudspeakers of the Candy Shoestring.533 Due to the rain, Jackson-based organ player Chalmers Davis covered his instrument and slept beside it on the stage. At “around 7:30 in the morning,” James C. Taylor walked up to stage, pulled out a half pint of Old Crow and

530 “Jerry was Hendrix,” recalled Mike Ward, and the drummer, “Boogie” Hobart, was “pure Iron Butterfly.” While he described them as somewhat of a “weird band,” he believed that together with Donnie Brown, who is still an amazing bass player, the band “made sense”; see, Michael Craig Ward, interview by T. DeWayne Moore, Proud Larry’s, Oxford, Mississippi, March 29, 2013.
offered it to Davis, who thought “it was a little early to be drinking.” Taylor, in response, declared, “Shoot, every day starts with the Crow.”

It was not until late in the afternoon that the festival resumed with the performance of Shadowfax, which the editor of Kudzu referred to as a “good high energy band” from Monticello and Hamburg, Arkansas. Rubber Onis Fiasco followed with a repeat of its previous lackluster performance, and the Candy Shoestring also delivered a second set, but this time they welcomed the talents of Chalmers Davis, the organ player from Jackson. Next up was a solo artist named Eric Ballew, a college student and booking agent for coffeehouses in Jackson. He sat in chair and attempted to deliver “some quiet acoustic stuff,” but the clatter of moving equipment all but drowned out his efforts. By the time Electrix John, of Arkansas, came to the stage, a crowd of several hundred had gathered at Mixonville. The setting of the Sunday sun welcomed to the stage a relatively new and unheard group from Jackson called Mississippi X. The “professionally competent” group, in the opinion of Doggett, “could really turn on a crowd.” He had seen the band perform two times, and each time “they brought the crowd to its feet screaming.” Even though it started to rain again shortly into their set, the band managed to keep most of its audience in front of the stage “shouting for more.”

In the end, every single band that performed at the Delta Rock Festival featured an all-white lineup. Since the beginning, Ward planned to include two large, mostly brass, African American bands from Greenville—the World Band and the Leon Wright Orchestra. The two all-

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534 Chalmers Davis, online correspondence, September 20, 2014.
535 In the late 1960s, Chalmers Davis was in a band called Shades Annabelle—“one of the best bands around while it lasted,” according David Doggett of the Kudzu—and he later became a member of the Shooters, a country band founded in Muscle Shoals, which recorded on many of the country hits recorded in the 1970s; see, “The Delta Festival,” Kudzu 3:3 (Nov 1970): 3-4.
536 Eric Ballew attended school in Jackson, but he moved to Anniston, Alabama to manage Newsom’s Music Center in the mid-1970s; see, Mike Stamler, “Newsom’s Manager ‘Suited for his Job,’” The Anniston (AL) Star, Nov 16, 1975, p.51.
black groups were scheduled as the headliners of the final evening of entertainment. On the other hand, David Doggett noticed it was when “most of the crowd would have left anyway.” The onset of the rain, in any case, kept the two big bands off the uncovered flatbed. With brass instruments that could not endure the rainy conditions, both groups departed Mixonville never having taken the stage.

The only performances by black musicians were in between sets. One local black harmonica player, James C. Taylor, demonstrated his solo harp work in several impromptu performances. His “usual band” could not make it, and he failed to convince some of the white musicians to back him up. According to Doggett, the musicians and stage crew seemed to tolerate him rather than welcome him, much like the largely white crowd, which grew tired of his spontaneous appearances on Saturday. The harmonica player got up on the stage in between sets again on Sunday, and this time he managed to get a little backup help from the Candy Shoestring. Pulling his “little harmonica out of his pocket,” Doggett believed that he made as much music as anyone who played during the festival. The “large number of black faces in the crowd,” he declared, as well as some whites, were “more than happy” to get a break from all the “white rock” music. It was “a most welcome sight,” argued Doggett, the “Delta blues being played in the Delta, not Chicago, or the Ann Arbor Blues Festival.” The majority of the crowd “treated his performance as a joke, like he was a comedian who came to keep the crowd happy while the white groups were moving their equipment.” Another black singer tried to sing with Mississippi X, but the stage crew, believing he was heavily inebriated, came up and made him get off the microphone. The incident failed to strike a nerve for anyone in the crowd, except the editor.

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“Hell,” Doggett exclaimed, “if a man couldn’t sing drunk nobody would have ever sung the blues!” Too caught up in preconceived notions of professional musical performance, the musicians and spectators had come to play and hear rock music—not the blues. It was not a blues festival; it was a rock festival. Ward believed that had there been any rock bands around with any black members, he would not have thought twice about recruiting them. Thus, only the local brass bands who had studied at one of the state’s historically black colleges came out and the rural troubadour friends of Mixon. Unable yet to recognize such a unique performance from an unknown Delta blues artist who is now forgotten in the history completely, the crowd was not accepting of his spontaneous, “salt and pepper” jam sessions. Most concertgoers planned to have a good time and “forget about those draggy things like racism and poverty,” and it proved very possible. As reminders of such issues appeared onstage between sets, the crowd either ignored or expressed discontent with their music.

The experiences of David Doggett at Mixonville inspired a broader critique of the entire rock music industry and a more personal critique of his own lack of involvement. Speaking to the “many people” who traced the beginnings of rock ‘n roll to the 1950s emergence of Elvis Presley, he pointed out that most of his music was first performed by black musicians. “The roots of rock ‘n roll [were] in black music,” he argued, but it was the white musicians and the white-owned record companies getting rich. Doggett charged that whites had dealt with black musicians “in an aggressive, unjust, and spiteful manner.” In essence, he concluded, “we’ve f---ed them over.” Even though he believed that none of the people at the Delta Festival were “consciously racist,” Doggett definitely believed that he should have assisted in the freshman effort more than he did. In the 1970s Mississippi Delta, over a thousand whites and at least a

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538 Ibid.
few blacks got together and listened to music, even though it was a bunch of white rockers, with no racial incidents whatsoever. Considering the amount of protest and moral outrage leading up to the bold endeavor, some folks were pleasantly surprised to come through the weekend in one piece. Back then—just as it is today—it takes conscious effort on the part of all whites in the United States everyday to recognize the benefits of white privilege.

Probably very few...people in the music industry are consciously racist, but somehow most of the money and fame goes to whites. This is called institutionalized racism. Nobody ever says ‘n---er’ but the whites always end up on top, because the everyday institutions of society are stacked against the black man. It’s going to take conscious effort by all of us every day to overcome this, and I’m not sure we made enough conscious effort at the Delta Festival.540

The crowd inflicted little to no damage at Mixonville, but beer cans, paper, and other trash littered the grounds, which prompted cleanup crews to get to work early Monday morning. The stabbing of Ricky Herndon early Sunday morning, following an earlier altercation in a local nightclub, was the only serious problem of the whole festival besides traffic issues and persistent electrical problems.541 The police arrested six people on misdemeanor crimes, such as public drunkenness, creating a disturbance, and fleeing the scene of a car accident. Despite these incidents, local police claimed that the festival crowd gave them less trouble than usual from locals on a weekend.542 Moreover, there were no drug-related arrests.543 Deputy Cloy admitted that he witnessed no drug use at all. “Even I,” Ward purported, “didn’t see any drug use...It was the most perfect thing I’ve ever seen in my life.”544

540 Ibid.
541 Herndon later refused to identify his attacker, which effectively ended the sheriff’s investigation of the stabbing; see, “Tight-lipped Youth Recuperating from Wounds,” DDT, Oct 21, 1970, p.1.
“The Delta Festival,” the young promoter declared in a letter to the editor, “was indeed successful in its attempt to bring people together for a weekend of peace and music in the country.” He sent out special thanks to all the sponsors, the police, and the bands that came “at their own expense,” and he expressed gratitude to the people who came out to the soggy field and made the event a modest financial success.\(^545\) Though Ward did not remember exactly how much money they made off the event, he recalled that they donated several hundred dollars to Edge City, a fledgling countercultural center in Jackson.\(^546\) One memorandum from the Greater Jackson Arts Council (GJAC) informed that the promoters of the “Greenville Delta Rock Festival” donated five hundred dollars to the coffeehouse at Edge City to compensate Dacus Haining for his “help with arrangements.”\(^547\) The three promoters (Ward, Bertschler and Jones) split the remaining profits into equal shares, and Ward later used his portion to pay for the birth of his first daughter.\(^548\) Having survived his first foray into the public spotlight, Ward closed the letter, “You’re all great, and we’re looking forward to working with you again on another festival sometime in the future.”\(^549\)

Mike Ward read the review of the event in *Kudzu* when it came out in 1970, and Doggett lays it out rather baldly in his review that “the end result was racist.” While Ward was certainly less than enthused about the stinging indictment, it’s not a simple as saying it “was racist.” The vague nature of the indictment reveals the lack of understanding at the time of how systemic the influence of racial discrimination had become. An unidentified cameraperson acknowledged the

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\(^{547}\) The coffeehouse needed to install new plumbing as required by the latest city order before the venue could open its doors. The city was determined, in the opinion of GJAC, to place endless obstacles in the path of Edge City and thwart the efforts of several dozen young volunteers; see, “Recommendations of Executive Committee, Greater Jackson Arts Council,” Oct 30, 1970, MSC Files, SCR ID # 6-76-0-9-2-1-1.
preserve of a small numbers of curious African American youths standing at the front of the stage, which indeed was a step forward and not behind, and indeed good thing in the Delta.\textsuperscript{550} The lack of organizing experience on the part of young promoters, as well as the persistent distractions and threats of violence, prevented the organizers from staging the perfect event. In fact, it’s quite remarkable that it came off at all. David Doggett and other members of the counterculture in Jackson had been left on their own—outside the ranks of the old line civil rights groups of the early 1960s—to combat racism in the white community. Due to the fact that only food was offered as compensation, only bands who could afford to drive all the way out to Mixonville and play a free show got to play. The young promoters did not realize that by not offering performing artists any money, it inherently limited their chances of persuading any minority bands to perform at Mixonville. It simply did not occur to them that it might be a good idea, or it was outside of their means.

In some ways, of course, the countercultural youths at Mixonville could not separate themselves from the American mainstream, and they came to depend what remained available to them from the mainstream, specifically the concert quality sound equipment accumulated over time by the Candy Shoestring, the mass of meat and beer to fill the store at Mixonville, and the prevalent upper middle-class ability to drive out into the rural Delta. Their normative investments in white privilege limited the extent to which the crowd was interracial; nor was it designed to challenge any of preconceived notions of folks at the Delta Festival.

“Nevertheless, mistakes were surely made,” Alice Echols argues in her 1999 book *Scars of Sweet Paradise*, “not the least being the assumption that personal and cultural transformation could be easily achieved—a matter of breaking off and breaking through. It was an assumption

\textsuperscript{550} David Barber, *A Hard Rain Fell: SDS and Why It Failed* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 8.
that blinded us to how deeply marked we all were by the conventions and expectations of the mainstream, no matter how ‘counter’ we proclaimed ourselves.”

The festival that occurred on Mixonville in 1970 was an important event in the state’s history of rock music festivals. Though the promoters’ defiant decision cut against the mainstream, the crowd’s general disinterest in the performances of black musicians, the only slightly integrated nature of the crowd, and the absence of black musicians on stage reflected the culture from which they growing up in the Delta. Even though some folks still use an expletive before saying Doggett’s name to this day, even more than forty years later, the Delta Festival later informed Charles Bannerman when he recognized a festival as the liberal white communities’ preferred site for racial reconciliation to take place in the Delta. Michael Ward pursued local political influence along with such figures as Betty Jo Boyd, who later worked with Malcolm Wall’s at the initial blues festival in 1978, and Their roles as a political organizers for the Democratic Party helped to establish more pragmatic political alliances across the color line, and in three years come together to put a female representative of the grass roots on the city council.

**ANTI-ROCK FESTIVAL BILL IN MS**

There was no follow-up to the Delta Festival. Less than a month later, the public outcry against the controversial event impelled state representatives to introduce legislation aimed at preventing future rock festivals in Mississippi. In mid-November, representative Malcolm Mabry, of Dublin, an “ultra-right” politician who one newspaper described as “an outspoken

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segregationist,” first sponsored the consideration of House Bill 104, which prohibited “rock festivals” unless promoters posted a $50,000 cash bond to cover potential damages, obtained a permit from the county sheriff sixty days before the event, and adhered to a stringent set of sanitation and health requirements. The House Judiciary Committee that studied the bill and forwarded its concerns included several representatives from Greenville, specifically a young, music-loving attorney named Doug Abraham, who criticized its “rather strenuous” conditions and vague definitions. He noticed, for example, that the bill failed to define the term “rock festival,” placing in jeopardy other large events, such as the many arts festivals that attracted thousands of people each year. “As I understand it,” Abraham explained, “the bill does not define a rock festival and this could possibly be taken by some to preclude even having [the Mississippi Arts] festival.” In addition, he was hesitant to endorse such overarching legislation. Considering how local police had handled the Delta Festival, he believed it better to deal with such issues on the local level. Abraham maintained that communities and local officials “should be in agreement with those wanting to hold a rock festival, so that it can be properly organized and coordinated.”

In light of his criticisms, the House Judiciary Committee suggested a host of changes and introduced a revamped draft of the bill in February 1971. The new version not only defined the

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553 A graduate of Greenville High School, Doug Abraham attended the University of Mississippi and served as president of student government. He attended the University of Vienna and the Hague Academy of International Law before graduating law school at UM. He returned home to practice in Greenville, where he served as chairman of the Delta Music Association. Beginning in 1963, Abraham received high praise for his “civic-conscious” attitude in leading the drive to raise $20,000 as a disc-jockey on WDDT Radiothon, and he remained the “top disc jockey” for the fundraising drive throughout the decade; see, “Lawyer, Civic Leader to Run for House Post,” DDT, Apr 30, 1967, p.1; “Doug Abraham Praised For CP Activities,” DDT, May 1, 1963, p.2; “Radiothon Nets $14,700 for CP Center,” DDT, May 10, 1965, p.1; “Radiothon Nets $19,829, Winds Up With a Splash,” DDT, Apr 29, 1968, p.1.

term “rock festival” as a mass gathering for the performance of “rock-type music” lasting more than eighteen hours, but it also reduced both the temporal requirements to obtain a permit (from sixty to ten days) as well as the amount of the surety bond (from $50,000 to $10,000). The bill still required promoters to comply with specific health and safety requirements, and it called for a maximum fine of up to $30,000 for staging a rock festival without a permit. The House of Representatives passed the measure later in the month. The state senate—with no dissenting votes—approved the bill soon thereafter. Senator Vol Jones, of Waynesboro, a “staunch segregationist” who stood against the adoption of the 1965 Voting Rights Act until the bitter end, forwarded the overall message of the unanimous vote in a facetious amendment to scrap the wording of the bill and have it read simply: “There ain’t going to be any rock festival in Mississippi.”

The new anti-festival regulations were, in fact, much less stringent than similar measures adopted in other states. After over two hundred thousand people showed up at the Atlanta Pop Festival in July 1970, leaving the small town of Byron a “polluted and littered mess,” the mayor promised to take legal steps, as well as appeal to the state legislature, to prevent the return of the festival. “It’s the worst thing that ever happened to this area of the country,” he complained, “Everything within five miles of here is littered [and] I don’t know if we will ever recover.”

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555 “House in Miss Set to Consider Rockfest Bill,” BRA, Feb 16, 1971, p.12.
556 The bill also stipulated that no tickets could be sold seventy-two hours prior to the event to allow a reasonable estimation of the crowd size. At least eighteen days prior to the commencement of the event, moreover, promoters had to submit thorough plans and specifications regarding location, water supply, toilet and bathing facilities, sewage disposal system, drainage, refuse storage and disposal, food service, medical facilities, insect and noxious weed control, fire protection, and sleeping areas and facilities. The submitted plans had to include a rigid description of the festival premises, including the fence locations, drainage routes, roads, camping section, and parking lots. If located in a rural area, the state board also required adequate lighting; see, Hugh B. Cottrell, “Regulation Governing Rock Festivals,” June 1, 1971, MSC Files SCR ID # 99-20-0-46-1-1-1 to 99-20-0-46-6-1-1; and “Insurance Bill OKed,” DDT, Feb 26, 1971, p.2.
558 “Popfest’s Last Notes are Over,” DDT, July 6, 1970, p.3.
The shockwave of outrage over the promoters’ lack of preparedness swept all the way to the Georgia Legislature, which passed House Bill 421 to block future rock festivals in Georgia. While it included a host of health and safety restrictions, the most severe section required promoters of events attracting over five thousand people (as well as lasting over fifteen hours) to deposit a security bond of one million dollars to ensure proper cleanup of the festival site.\(^559\) The high cash bond, indeed, made sure that law enforcement and health officials would not “be bothered with pop festivals anywhere in Georgia.”\(^560\)

Calls to regulate and block festivals featuring music reflective of, and derived from, African American traditions, demonstrate the unyielding vigilance of southern white evangelicals, certainly in regards to the messages of false prophets who espouse the ideals of racial equality. The concepts of redemption and grace that African American religious leaders preached and put to practice during the Civil Rights Movement ultimately failed to break down the myths associated with southern history as well as the religious beliefs that buttressed them. The powerful pillars indeed continue to prove resilient, largely because, as historian Charles Reagan Wilson has explained, “the self-image of a chosen people leaves little room for self-criticism,” a concept which “has led to the greatest evils of the religion-culture link in the South.”\(^561\)

White evangelical Protestants generally embrace initiatives to convert the adherents of other religions, whether it’s Muslims, Jews, Hindus, or any other non-Christians. The act of witnessing, however, carries with it implications of disrespect, which sometimes provokes a


\(^{560}\) “Stiff Bonds for Festivals to be Studied,” Augusta Chronicle, Jan 9, 1971, p.4.

complementary response from other religions, some of which are as equally determined and as willing to use violence as evangelicals. Fundamentalists of all religious stripes tend to be secure in their faith, a fact which almost renders conversion a lost cause. The issue put forward in this case is political, however, not religious. By expressing derisive attitudes and trivializing other religions, Baptists and other fundamentalists plant the seeds and celebrate the harvest of religious violence and verbal attacks. No one is concerned too much about mass conversions; the real threat of these “outreach” and conversion efforts is that they “encourage some to express hatred and commit violence against religious communities different from their own.”

The inability of the South at large to shift its historical perspective, as well as the religious dogma that supports it, is directly related to southern whites’ inability to rethink both their history and their religion. Since each is a matter of religious belief, and religious belief is a basic element of identity, the adoption of a new southern theology, one compatible with a more inclusive version of southern history, has proven elusive into the new millennium. “The changes wrought by southern blacks and their federal allies, along with the Sunbelt prosperity that accompanied the initial resolution of civil rights issues in the South,” David Goldfield argues, “generated not only a revival of the traditional perspective of southern history, but a renewal of its religious partner as well.” Southern history and religion had reinforced each other for so long that white southerners found it compatible with respect to their version of evangelical Christianity. Similar to how the history of the Lost Cause helped raised white supremacy to a sacred and timeless truth, white evangelical Protestantism offers contemporary believers justifications for their beliefs as well as the southern way of life.

563 Ibid, 77-78.
The Greenville Chamber of Commerce (GCOC) increased its budget for 1968 to initiate a community advertising and public relations program, which promoted the city as “Mainstream U.S.A.” Referring to the city’s position on “two great mainstreams,” the Mississippi River and U.S. Highway 82, the program demonstrates how the wealth of services, cultural attractions, and respectable living conditions in Greenville made it an ideal destination for visiting mid-Delta residents and industrial development.\textsuperscript{565} The GCOC hired an advertising firm out of Jackson, Larry Painter and Associates, to devise the “comprehensive community advertising and promotion program” as well as put together a film to promote the advantages of industrial and commercial development in Greenville. The film debuted at Brown’s Delish Shoppe in March 1968 to a crowd of “optimists,” who were eager to see the city depicted as the mainstream of American life.\textsuperscript{566} An edited version of the film served as the foundation of an ambitious radio and television campaign, which played on, yet did not promulgate the pluralist view of the American mainstream. The promo depicted the city as “Many-Villes”—“Funsville,” for example, as well as “Serviceville” and “Cultureville”—but it did not discuss the heightening immigration of African Americans from the surrounding countryside, or the significant population of Chinese and Mexican immigrants who started coming to the Delta before the turn of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{567} By going with the slogan “Many-villes,” the program allowed for many

\textsuperscript{566} “Optimists See ‘Mainstream’ Film,” \textit{DDT}, Mar 1, 1968, p.3.  
\textsuperscript{567} The largest group of Chinese immigrants living in the South (174) in 1910 was concentrated in three Delta counties with larger cities. Most of the 211 Chinese immigrants living in the same three counties—Coahoma, Bolivar, and Washington; again the largest group in 1920—had been recruited as farm laborers and quickly learned all about the backbreaking nature of work in the fields, rejecting it and either returning home or seeking other forms of work.\textsuperscript{567} In the 1910s, as many as ten grocery stores in Greenville were owned and operated by native-born and immigrant entrepreneurs from China, some of whom had migrated from California and Louisiana; see, “Help Sell Mainstream USA,” \textit{DDT}, Aug 7, 1968, p.16; John Jung, \textit{Chopsticks in the Land of Cotton: Lives of Mississippi Delta Chinese Grocers} (Self-published, 2008).
different future slogans to develop under its banner. The promo also highlighted the immense amount of historical and cultural resources in the Delta and emphasized the county’s pro-business attitude (anti-union, anti-regulation, extended tax breaks for employers), all the while tip-toing around the plight of an unusually high population of unemployed, unskilled African Americans in the Delta.

The film invoked and restored a pre-1960s discourse on race relations that emphasized paternalism, particularly in the increasingly racially-integrated economy, and promoted the continuance of racially-segregated social institutions through its harmonious and productive depiction of race relations. It constructed a vision of Greenville as the utopian capital of Mainstream U.S.A., where folks were too focused on production to quarrel. Some of the optimists criticized the program as a bit misleading; others claimed it pushed a dizzying array of associative monikers. Even though some folks preferred the current promotion strategy—a handful of modestly-placed signs across the mid-Delta, which promoted “just plain” Greenville as the “Center of Commerce, Culture and Industry”—the subsequent announcement about the construction of a new mall made it advantageous for the business community to support the Mainstream U.S.A. program. Later known as the Mainstream Mall, its establishment proved a reassuring step towards depicting the city as a “thriving center of retail goods and services,” which, along with the initial popularity of the campaign, encouraged a sustained financial commitment. The chamber allocated $15,000 for the program in 1969, as well as $40,000 over the following two years.

The Greenville Chamber of Commerce (GCOC) decided to revive and expand upon the city’s festival tradition on Lake Ferguson to recast the city’s image in the early 1970s. Hoping to

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provide a spark to its three-year promotional campaign, the chamber organized a series of concerts on the levee as the highlight of the “Mainstream Shop-In,” a month-long promotional event and the “largest of its kind ever undertaken” in Greenville. Sponsored by the retail council of the GCOC, which raffled off three cars and hired acrobat Dave Merrifield to perform twice daily on a trapeze slung under a helicopter, the trade promotion featured a three-night concert series staged on a floating barge on the waterfront. Three unidentified local bands performed on Thursday evening, and the fifty-member United States Navy Band performed on Friday. On Saturday, the unique Canadian/Native American country music band called “The Cheiftones” opened up for the headliner and “world’s greatest hillbilly saxophone player,” Boots Randolph, whose “lush and moody” 1960s releases on Monument Records, as well as his steady touring schedule, had helped broaden the appeal of country music.570

Considering the recent storm of protest against the 1970 Delta Festival as well as the passage of House Bill 104 to curb the staging of such large music-centered events, the GCOC made sure to emphasize the concert series did not meet the criteria for state regulation. “I think we should make clear,” one spokesperson asserted, “that we will not be sponsoring, nor do we intend to sponsor, any kind of ‘rock festival’ in the current sense of the term. We are simply arranging free entertainment to complement the Boots Randolph concert, and we don’t want anyone to misunderstand this.”571 With the events boasting such a “family-friendly” music lineup, however, no one mistook the concerts for a rock festival. Participating businesses reported significant increases in sales during the Mainstream Shop-In. Some critics even considered it the “beginning of a new life for the city as a retail and service center for 60 miles in

any direction.”572 The GCOC declared the event a “great success” and expressed a desire to make it an annual affair.573 One confident chamber member even guaranteed its “automatic” return the following year.574

The event’s return, however, was in no way “automatic.” The chamber set its sights much higher for the second annual Mainstream Shop-In, booking several popular country music artists, such as the Oak Ridge Boys, Tom T. Hall, and the Glaser Brothers, as well as a circus act known as “the largest carnival in the world.” Having yet to acquire the $22,000 required to fund the circus and the concert series, the GCOC realized that it may have set its sights too high.575 By September, it was clear that the Shop-In needed to gain the confidence of committee members and merchants, many of whom “were sitting back waiting to see what was going to happen” in retail expansion. Most new merchants, in addition, especially those in the new mall, had already exceeded their annual budgets, and downtown merchants were mired in costly revitalization efforts. The chamber, therefore, cut some of the entertainment and hoped to at least raise $12,000, but even that figure proved too high.576 In the end, the chamber had to cancel the trade promotion. According to its marketing chairman, due to an inability to “put together the first class shop-in that Greenvillians expect,” the GCOC abandoned their efforts in 1972, turning their attention instead to fundraising in hopes of resuming the celebration the following year.577

As the first order of business, the chamber enticed the support of local merchants by moving up the festivities from late fall to mid-summer, “the time of the year when retail

574574 “Chamber Staff Reduced,” DDT, Nov 14, 1971, p.2.
576 “Shop-In Discusses,” DDT, Sep 1, 1972, p.12.
establishments are in summer doldrums and could use the boost.” The chamber also changed the name of the city’s “largest retail promotion” to the Mainstream Festival as well as broadened the scope of activities well beyond the concert series to include sky diving exhibitions, military aircraft displays, classic antique automobile shows, parades, balloon races, a carnival, and stunt pilot performances. One tradition at the festival was a series of “family-friendly” concerts featuring an all but exclusive lineup of gospel and county music artists. In 1973, for example, the concerts on the levee included Danny Davis and the Nashville Brass Band; Canadian country music band Billy Thunderkloud and the Chieftones; a group of five young men and two young women from Iowa called The North Door; and the headliner, Tony Orlando and Dawn, a popular act that the chamber booked months prior to the release of their smash hit, “Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Old Oak Tree,” which reached #1 on the pop charts earlier in April.

Such a massive array of amusements would cost the GCOC in upwards of $40,000. While the promoters expected to receive some funds by collecting vendor fees and selling raffle tickets, the chamber needed a large sum of cash to begin putting the festival together. GCOC president Henry Vickery decided to reach out to the city council, which had been an amenable source of capital in past promotional efforts. Yet, instead of requesting money for publicity, the chamber asked for ten thousand dollars to include the dedication ceremonies of the new full-service airport, which, they argued, required a more elaborate entertainment schedule due to the likely presence of local and state politicians, including Senator James Eastland. After some discussion, the city council decided to provide the full amount not only to highlight the opening of the new airport, but also to help local retailers offset the losses suffered as a result of the

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579 The song reached number one on both the US and UK charts for four weeks in April 1973.
recent flood. In fact, the GCOC hoped to sell the festival to the national media by billing it as a benefit for recovering flood victims. In one questionable statement, Vickery admitted that he planned to ask media outlets to “plug us if you will and say that these people are coming out of the worst situation in years…and they’re having a big party celebrating the fact that the water is going down.” By developing a compelling—and perhaps dubious—promotional strategy for its much expanded festival program, the chamber garnered significant financial support and managed to bounce back from prior failure in 1972.

A one-time local newspaper editor, however, questioned both the city’s allocation of taxpayer dollars to the festival as well as its alleged mission to ease the suffering of local flood victims. In a letter to the editor, former DDT city editor Lew Powell acknowledged the potential concerns of taxpayers regarding the $10,000 contribution, but he also highlighted the fact that, adding up to only a dollar or so per household, it was “surely a pittance for such a gala affair.” Despite his sarcastic, yet still supportive, tone, Powell confessed his serious concerns about the festival’s alleged benefit for flood victims. He suspected the festival would, in fact, not benefit victims of the floods and instead “benefit the merchants who [had] suffered from the failure of the flood victims to ante up.” Ed Williams, formerly of Greenville, wrote a letter to the editor and pointed out the devastating effects of the recent flood, which had yet to recede in some areas along the river, leaving thousands of local business patrons homeless and destitute. He suggested that the city should take the money earmarked for “frivolities at the new airport terminal—money which the city obviously has no good use for—and give it to the fine folks” at Three-Mile Salvage, an overflowing junk yard and general eyesore on Air Base Road, which

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582 Lew Powell, letter to the editor, DDT, May 18, 1973, p.4.
offered a conspicuous welcome to all incoming airplane passengers as they touched down at the airport.\footnote{Ed Williams, letter to the editor, May 23, 1973, p.4.}

Ignoring all criticism and suggestions, the city council believed that municipal government maintained a responsibility to help promote the local retail economy, and the chamber had organized an impressive lineup of entertainment that promised to attract thousands of people from Louisiana, Arkansas, and Mississippi to celebrate Independence Day.\footnote{DDT, June 17, 1973, p.33; July 5, 1973, p.1; “Festival Group to Meet,” DDT, May 13, 1973, p.2.} Even though the Mainstream Festival was an expensive venture for both the city and contributing local businesses, it did boost trade, but not enough to recoup all of its expenditures. According to one published financial report, the extravaganza cost a total of $42,000 but it brought in only $39,000.\footnote{DDT, Sep 20, 1973, p.1.} Even though the chamber had to cover three thousand dollars in losses, DDT editor Hodding Carter III emphasized that the festival was much more than a mere a for-profit venture. He considered it a huge success that gave the city a “chance to show off a little for its neighbors and to remind them how many different reasons there” were for visiting Greenville. Carter also noted the benefits of hosting such a popular celebration, “a party which every kid, young and old, who attended enjoyed to the last note of the last band playing on the lakefront Saturday night.”\footnote{“The Mainstream Festival,” DDT, July 9, 1973, p.4.} Mayor Pat Dunne agreed with the newspaper editor, going so far as to send a “thank you” letter to the sponsors, in which he called the Mainstream Festival “one of the best things” that ever happened in Greenville.\footnote{“Thanks,” DDT, July 11, 1973, p.4.}

In late 1973, regional competitors had made several inquiries about the festival, which, according to the chamber president, offered proof as to “the effectiveness of this promotional
effort.”

One of the GCOC objectives in 1974, therefore, was the implementation of an “extended coordinated promotional program…through the newspaper, billboards, radio and television to reach all within driving distance” in hopes of bringing “residents of the Ark-La-Miss” to shop in Greenville. The chamber intended to build upon its prior success and attract even larger crowds to the Mainstream Festival. After the city decided to match its previous financial commitment to the endeavor, former news editor Lew Powell sent another, much more critical letter to the DDT acknowledging its coverage of a new tradition in local governance “amidst its paeans to the Mainstream Festival,” a tradition which he dubbed, “The Annual Chamber of Commerce Stick-Up.” In 1973, he argued, the chamber had utilized a lot of rhetorical “gobbledygook about dedicating the new airport and helping the flood victims, but it did not “bother with such subterfuge” and “just waddled right up to the public trough and slopped away” in 1974.

Powell also noticed the newspaper’s tendency to mistake news for publicity about the festival, and while he expected business and government to “occasionally fall in bed with one another,” he charged that “ménage a trois” was too much. His scathing comments prompted the DDT to publish the swift response of chamber president Carl Hagwood, who charged that the former city editor suffered from a “total lack of understanding of the festival” and its beneficial role to the local economy. “The festival promotion,” Hagwood explained, was a “proven method” to promote the city “as the shopping center” of the mid-Delta, and “the increases in sales tax receipts that the city enjoyed last year” served as proof of its economic benefit.

589 Lew Powell, letter to the editor, DDT, June 30, 1974, p.4.
590 “$10,000 Stick-Up,” editor’s note, DDT, June 30, 1974, p.4.
In a departure from its usual musical diet of country and gospel music, the chamber booked two local soul bands to perform several nights at the 1974 Mainstream Festival. An obscure local group called The Corruptions performed on Tuesday night, and the popular White Family Band played two shows, one on Monday night and one on Wednesday night. The family of musicians learned the business under the tutelage of their father, Jackson native Hal White, whose interest in music developed while supporting his family as a tractor driver in the Delta. It was difficult for him to support a family of ten working as a tractor driver. White and a few of his co-workers, therefore, got together with their “practically homemade instruments” and started supplementing their income on Saturday nights.\(^{591}\) When several of his children developed an ear for music in the mid-1960s, White encouraged them to sing and play different instruments. The passion of his oldest daughters Ema and Dorothy for singing, the skill of his sons Larry and Hershey Lee on the guitar, the considerable ability of eleven year-old Vicel on the organ, and the competency of eight year-old Hal White Jr. on the drums allowed for the cohesion that propelled them into, what one writer called, a “small-time entertainment whirl.” Dubbed the White Family Band in 1970, the young musicians quickly earned a professional reputation in such local venues as the Mixon Garrett VFW Post as well as outdoor political rallies for Robert Clark of Holmes County, the first black state representative since Reconstruction.\(^{592}\) Before long, the group boasted a solid string of bookings on the weekends with a repertoire consisting of soul music, rock ‘n roll, and “the atonal electronic sounds [that] the long-hair groups were putting out.”\(^{593}\)

While the inclusion of local black artists is notable, the traditional lineup of “family-friendly” country and gospel acts continued to dominate the concerts on the levee. On each night

of the festival, the chamber scheduled performances by six young men known as Brush Arbor, a gospel group which invoked the spirit of early religious camp meetings and offered “some wholesome and positive reinforcement for the soul.”

The headliner on Friday night was country music singer Jody Miller, who won a Grammy for her tribute to domestic goddesses, “The Queen of the House,” in 1966. The largest crowd in the festival’s history rushed to the waterfront on Saturday night to witness the headlining performance of Ray Stevens, a comic singer/songwriter whose novelty records had sold millions of copies, and whose latest single, “The Streak,” enjoyed a two-week stint at #1 on Billboard’s Top 100. Local police estimated that between 25,000 and 35,000 people were tightly packed on the concrete boat landing and overflowing onto the grassy levee to watch Stevens and his band atop the floating stage in Lake Ferguson. At least half of the enthusiastic crowd had travelled from outside the city to attend the final concert, according to the GCOC, which made an immediate economic impact on local businesses. In light of such a massive turnout, Hodding Carter III asserted that the 1974 Mainstream Festival was indeed a “solid success,” and he credited the efforts of “individuals and firms who for reasons of civic pride and self-interest” had “firmly established” the annual event as a “major drawing card and community showcase.”

The forced integration of public schools, increased access to better-paying jobs and public accommodations, and the growth of black political participation dissuaded the television network crews, investigative reporters and photographers from roaming the state in the 1970s. No longer in the national spotlight, the state began to project an upbeat message to the rest of the

nation about how much the most intransigent of southern states had changed along racial lines. The Mississippi Agricultural and Industrial Board adopted another advertising slogan that pleaded with Americans to “Re-Think Mississippi,” which some folks thought sent the wrong message by sounding apologetic. Governor William Waller, the former district attorney who had failed twice to secure the murder conviction of Byron de la Beckwith, flew around the country in an airplane that boasted, “Mississippi: the State of Change.” By proclaiming the state-wide observance in 1973 of Medgar Evers Memorial Festival Day, which marked the tenth anniversary of the assassination of the Mississippi civil rights leader and state field secretary of the NAACP, Waller also reinforced the notion that Mississippi was “rising with the light of a new day.” Reflecting the policies of almost every other southern governor elected in 1972, he urged Mississippians to “continue efforts toward promoting peace, harmony and economic progress for our state,” which created a tremor among both blacks and whites, many of whom remained accustomed to “only angry, race-baited words” against blacks in the orations of the state’s leading politicians. The issue of race, indeed, had always been an overriding question in state elections until the early 1970s, when, according to one Mississippi journalist, it seemed to slip into the “background as no longer a determining political factor.”

“I have witnessed a truly remarkable phenomenon,” declared Charles Moore, the local black activist who deserved the lion’s share of credit for establishing the Herbert Lee Memorial

600 The first trial of Greenwood native Byron de la Beckwith in 1963 ended in a 6-6 deadlock, and the second trial the following year was declared a mistrial; after being out on bond for several years, the indictment against him was dismissed; “Mississippi Plans Evers Festival,” The Washington Post, June 12, 1973, p.A5; “Day Set in Honor of Medgar Evers,” NYT, June 12, 1973, p.22.
Center in honor of the slain civil rights leader from Belzoni. He did not share the enthusiasm of the liberal editor concerning the popularity of the Mainstream Festival. In Greenville, he argued, politicians gave lip service to maintaining good “relations between the races,” and depicted the city as the Mainstream of America, a progressive city with racial “harmony,” a city moving in the right direction, in which people from all walks of life are making a concerted effort to make it a better place in which to live by embracing the golden rule. The whole campaign was “a lot of bull,” in Moore’s opinion. Citing the segregated nature of summer programs, unequal access to public facilities, tokenism and shallow promises as evidence of the racial problems, he urged blacks to “wake up” to the fact that “the white power structure” was taking advantage of them.\(^{603}\) The promotional efforts of the GCOC, indeed, constituted little more than a distraction for the continuing racial inequalities in the city.

The Mainstream Festival, nevertheless, reached new heights in attendance and economic impact in 1974. Its success not only helped garner more participation on the local level, but it also compelled the chamber to expand the geographical scope of the festivities and schedule “more entertainment than ever before” in 1975. In addition to its usual request for $10,000, the GCOC requested an additional $5,000 from the city council to cover the enlargement. Perhaps due to the criticisms of former city editor Lew Powell, whose most recent letter to the editor took a sarcastic tone and chortled about the misuse of public funds, the council did not approve the increased amount; rather, they decided to wait until after the event, check the balance sheet, and then decide whether or not to allocate any funds.\(^{604}\) The GCOC still decided to move forward with its expanded plans, adding an extra day of activity to allow for entertainment at three


important shopping centers—the two malls and the downtown shopping park. In addition to a ventriloquist “for the children,” karate demonstrations, and skydiving exhibitions, the festival included appearances at all three sites by Jeff Allen, of the Tammy Wynette Show, as well as the “south of the border sounds” of the Mexicali Brass. Continuing its efforts to showcase local talent, the chamber kicked off the concerts on the levee with a “Battle of the Bands,” offering awards for the best rock band, soul band, and gospel group. While the battle provided stage time to some of the more obscure regional groups, such as The Fresh Heir, the Delta Music Company, Jack Curtis and the Bayou Playboys, and Larry D. and Fire, it also pitted the soul/rock reverberations of the White Family Band against the big-band soul music of the Mod Musicians, a local and racially-integrated band—for the title of best local soul band.605

Founded in early 1971, the Mod Musicians featured Greenville native and popular singer Johnnie Caston, who recorded as a backup singer for Chess Records and Motown in the late-1960s. She did not remain in the band too long, however, as she decided to tour with the Little Milton Band as well as perform at political rallies across the state for gubernatorial candidate Charles Evers.606 Without Caston’s vocal talent, the Mod Musicians had to rebuild its reputation in the Delta. Hoping to project an image of racial tolerance and mutual cooperation, the original seven black members picked up a talented white guitarist named Donnie Narron, with whom the band played at local social and civic events. The new conglomeration of the group soon piqued

605 The Mod Musicians were a Greenville soul band, which featured a white lead guitarist and seven black musicians. In 1971, the group started playing local social and civic affairs. The makeup of the band drew the attention of one local journalist, who interviewed them about the inclusion of white lead guitarist Donnie Narron. “It wasn’t a matter of race or color when he got in the group,” asserted saxophonist Willie Polk, “he was just another musician [and] all we were interested in was how well he could play our music.” Narron fit in with the group quite well, which helped the large group recover its flair after losing popular vocalist Johnnie Caston, who left the group to tour with Little Milton; see, “Race is No Barrier for Band,” DDT, Dec 8, 1971, p.14; “Bands Battle Tonight,” DDT, June 30, 1975, p.1.

606 Caston decided to embark on a solo career in late 1971, when she performed a “Soul Review” at the VFW home on North Theobald in Greenville; see, “Singer Johnnie Caston to Give Soul Review,” DDT, Oct 1, 1971, p.5
the curiosity of one local reporter, who interviewed the band about the unique inclusion of Narron. “It wasn’t a matter of race or color when he got in the group,” asserted saxophonist Willie Polk, “he was just another musician [and] all we were interested in was how well he could play our music.” Narron proved an excellent axe man, who fit in well with the group, and soon helped the large soul group recover at least some of its prior popularity and flair.

The winners of the contests remained difficult to discern, but the mere booking of such a large number of rock and soul artists demonstrated that producers had increased the number of black and Hispanic musicians who performed contemporary music styles. Yet, the producers also relegated the battling black bands to performing on the initial days of the festival, which usually attracted smaller crowds of a couple thousand. In contrast, almost 25,000 people filled the waterfront on the second to last night of the festival to hear the music, watch the fireworks, and ride the carnival rides. Offering its usual diet of country music, the majority of the crowd came out for the headlining performance of the concert on the levee series featuring country music singer Lynn Anderson, who recorded a host of hit songs and recently won an award for “Favorite Female Country Artist” at the American Music Awards.

Only about six thousand people, however, turned out to the concrete wharf on the final night, despite another impressive fireworks display, a karate exhibition, skydivers, and the music of the Mexicali Brass as well as singer Jeff Allen. By comparing attendance levels on each night of the festival, the promoters easily concluded that the appearance of famous country music artists was crucial to not only to

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608 In June 20, 1976, the Mod Musicians warmed up the crowd for B.B. King; see, *DDT*, June 20, 1976, p.3.
the popularity and success of the Mainstream Festival, but also in stimulating the local economy—a primary mission of the GCOC.

The Mainstream Festival promised to attract much larger crowds and produce even higher piles of garbage during the celebration of the nation’s Bicentennial. 612 Though “most Americans desire fervently that the promise and premises of their nation’s founding Declaration remain its guiding beacon,” Hodding Carter III argued, “the nation’s affluence and power say nothing about what is to come, because both are value-free, amoral.”613 Autocracy and oppression can produce power and material wealth, while also placing serious constraints on freedom. As the nation prepared to celebrate two hundred years of freedom from colonial rule, DDT outdoors editor Gordon Hartley explained how the nation’s forefathers put their lives and fortunes on the line to sign the Declaration of Independence, a traitorous act punishable by death

612 The environmental impact of the chamber’s promotional program on Lake Ferguson became an issue in 1975. The previous summer, several fish kills resulted from the economic impetus of pollution in the private sector, and the resulting press coverage of unscrupulous practices, indictments, and convictions put public awareness at an all-time high. In August, one woman reported a towboat company dumping unidentified fluids into the lake, which soon produced a notable amount of floating, lifeless fish. Brent Towing Company, of Greenville, pumped ammonia from a barge into Lake Ferguson, killing over twenty thousand fish. The U.S. Gypsum Company, in addition, was found guilty of pumping three million gallons of wastewater into the lake. Despite being such a “valuable lake,” DDT outdoors columnist Gordon Hartley lamented, Lake Ferguson was “often polluted by various firms.” Hartley decried the irresponsible and illegal dumping practices of private enterprise, but he particularly despised the complicity of local governance and the “cost-benefit ratio” defense of pollution, which, in his opinion, emanated from the brain trust of the GCOC. The argument, usually employed by leaders in business and industry, states that the high costs of waste disposal made certain levels of pollution acceptable, definitely preferable, and sometimes even necessary for the continuance of municipal and economic growth. This dubious rationale incensed the columnist, and when he received complaints during the festival, alleging that city employees had washed all the trash from the wharf into Lake Ferguson, he feared the “valuable lake” would wind up as devoid of life as pesticide-polluted Lake Washington. “It is bad enough for a fisherman to toss his empty pop or beer can” into the lake, Hartley charged, “but for a branch of government to do what has been alleged is gross.” The massive increase in spectators at the past two festivals led to overcrowding on the waterfront, which all but assured that an immense amount of garbage scattered the wharf after the concerts. City workers, unprepared for such a massive cleanup, decided to simply wash the debris down the ramp, contributing to the already high amount of pollution at Lake Ferguson. Using the “cost-benefit ratio” defense, it was a prudent (read: cheap) method of garbage disposal—as opposed to pick up and removal. The political influence and economic stimulus programs of the GCOC, however, in large part safeguarded the institution and ensured the continuance of the trade promotion in 1976; see, DDT, Aug 11, 1974, p.31; “Brent Towing Cited in Fish Kill,” DDT, Aug 16, 1974, p.1; “Treatment Plant is Working,” DDT, Mar 17, 1974, p.9; DDT, Aug 25, 1974, p.27; Lake Washington, the county’s largest lake, had been dead for several years as a fishery resource due to pesticide pollution; see, Gordon Hartley, “Delta Outdoors,” DDT, June27, 1976, p.26; “Branton-Teague Boat Ramp Under Fire,” DDT, July 6, 1975, p.27.

in the eyes of the British. While many people demand respect for their rights, Hartley questioned the convictions of some people to stand up and protect their freedoms. The concept of freedom not only guaranteed certain rights, it also demanded that good citizens make sacrifices for the overall betterment of society and the perpetuation of its freedoms. One local minister, for example, who sought information about forming an organic gardening club, never got involved with the group because one member of his congregation was an executive at a local chemical company. “Was this man free?” Hartley wondered, and “What of future generations and their right to fish?”

Lake Ferguson was on the verge of becoming yet another body of water—similar to the many pesticide-poisoned lakes of the Delta—that no longer served as fishery resources, and the timber companies opposed water control structures on oxbow lakes, which stopped erosion in the drains that lead to the river. “The reason,” he asserted, “can be none other than greed,” and the expense was the fishing rights of future generations. Hartley hoped that the Bicentennial brought “more than celebrations and sales” into the Delta. He also wondered what folks in the Delta were willing to “risk for the chance” to truly exercise its freedoms.

THE MAINSTREAM FESTIVAL BICENTENNIAL SALUTE OF 1976

Local attitudes about the Bicentennial varied from wholesale embrace to outright disgust, and public celebrations themselves ranged from ostentatious gimmicks to sincere expressions of patriotism. Africans Americans and other ethnic groups expressed a concern about being left out entirely, considering the prevalent omission of minorities from the popular narratives of American history. The Black Power Movement, as well as other identity-focused movements

615 Ibid.
across the country, provided minorities a much louder voice in the public sphere in the 1970s. The emergence of the new social history, moreover, was beginning to discover the long-lost historical narratives of minority groups in America, which encouraged more inclusive, pluralist visions of American culture and tradition. The Bicentennial also proffered a host of simplistic celebrations focused on nationalist expressions of patriotism, which tended to exclude or minimize the more problematic aspects of the nation’s history. This was the approach taken by the GCOC in Greenville. Even though the Mainstream Festival had over the past couple of years become a more racial-inclusive event on stage, the producers decided to take a step back during the Bicentennial Celebration.

Considering the steady, then explosive, growth of the carefully structured Mainstream Festival, the GCOC had achieved a level of notoriety in the region for its (primarily country music) concerts on the levee series. The musical balance of the headliners, therefore, was even more heavily tilted towards country music in 1976. Out of the three headlining acts, the chamber paid six thousand dollars to both popular 1960s recording artist Brenda Lee, who had returned to her roots as a country singer in the 1970s, and rising country music star and actor Jerry Reed. LaCosta Tucker, the slightly less popular sister of country music star Tanya Tucker, also headlined one night of the 5th annual Mainstream Festival. The performance fees of the three headlining artists made up almost fifty percent of the total cost of the festival, $33,000. The city council once again provided $10,000 to the GCOC, but local merchants covered the remaining costs, in hopes of making back their investments and profiting from sales in concessions and retail commerce. Billed as a “Bicentennial Salute,” the festival committee

presented the most “family friendly” group of entertainers in its short history. Had one token band of jazz musicians from New Orleans been absent from one full-page advertisement in the *DDT*, the presence of African Americans would have been wholly absent from the festival program.618

June 30—The Navy Band and Today’s Teens, a massive church singing group
July 1—The Edwardians and LaCosta Tucker
July 2—The Edwardians (all-white 12-piece singing group) and Jerry Reed
July 3—The Emeralds (three white female singers) and Brenda Lee
July 4—Bicentennial Salute with U.S. representative David Bowen, Community Chorus Children’s Choir, Dixie Etheridge, and the Changes
July 5—The Olympia Brass Band, The Loretto Hilton Repertory Theatre (dramatic history of the steamboat), and the St. Louis Ragtime Band

The decision to exclude black from performing during the Bicentennial was an especially noticeable to one militant, homegrown black activist with a cogent understanding of American history and a penchant for promoting the cultural heritage of African Americans.

The lineup symbolized the message that African Americans were not “capable of doing the work as sufficiently” of building this nation. “THIS WE ALL know is a lie,” Sutton charged:

The truth is that ‘he who controls the image controls the mind, and he who controls the mind controls the body...If you convince a man that he is worthless, if you can convince him that people have contributed nothing to society, you don’t have to send him to the back door; he will find it himself, and if there is no back door, he will...make one himself.

This is what has happened to the black [man.] He has been told that he is nothing, therefore, he reacts with a nothing attitude. If they are provided with jobs, so as they can better themselves, their communities and their families, and so they won’t have to use the back door again, maybe their lives then will be better able to help these our United States.

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Sutton relates a story of a young black girl, who had no money for dolls and went to work at an early age in the kitchens of whites. After cooking and washing the clothes of white families for many years, she looked down into the dishwater and “saw a ghastly and horrible image” of herself. “Black girl you are beautiful,” he informed, “but you’ll never know it looking into that dishwater.” The inclusion of African Americans in the patriotic celebrations was crucial to the process of acculturation into the American mainstream. The fear of integrated social gatherings disturbed whites in Greenville.

The chamber’s decision to book only country music artists as headliners exacerbated the already ambivalent feelings of African Americans about the bicentennial celebrations of 1976. While the record industry executives responsible for merchandising popular songs had some idea about the worth of black music, the GCOC as well as the majority of white folks in Greenville could not appreciate, much-less fully understand the value of black music among African Americans, many of whom, in turn, did not identify with patriotic sentiments, especially in a state that once championed slavery and only-recently abandoned Jim Crow. Longtime local and vocal black power advocate Donald Sutton, of the Delta Ministry, representing a group of disgruntled local blacks who decried the lack of diverse entertainment, charged that the “celebration on the levee” was not conducive to the interests of all citizens and did “not recognize the contributions [of] black people” in the founding of the nation. Considering that blacks did not gain independence on July 4, 1776 and continued to face racial inequality in employment, housing, education, and healthcare, he did not see any reason for black folks to give time and attention to the two hundredth birthday of America. Having once called it

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“National Pig’s Day,” he proposed the organization of Greenville Liberation Day, an event which provided an opportunity to “counteract this racist society.”621 One writer for MACE’s newspaper *The Voice*, drawing from the June 1976 speech of Rep. Charles B. Rangle, of Harlem, emphasized, “This is not a time for celebration; it is a time to continue the revolution, to fulfill its promises.” For blacks “to celebrate is to join in the process of oppression against ourselves; to say we approve of our lot in this country. No group of people can afford to do this.”622 While Sutton urged black folks to “buy black; wear black; drink black; eat black; live black; and think black” on Independence Day, *The Voice* suggested that black folks visit other black communities, buy black on the “buy-centennial,” hold family reunions, and take pilgrimages to “the shrines of our history,” returning home in both a spiritual and figurative sense.623

A version of this concept materialized in the town of Bolton, where black mayor Bennie Thompson organized a “soul picnic” to “foster black family unity,” observe the two hundred year struggle of blacks in America, and enjoy the performances of gospel, jazz, and rock groups.624 The mayor appointed Ken Lawrence, a correspondent for the radical newspaper *The Southern Patriot*, to direct the Bolton Bicentennial Project, which included a series of imaginative reenactments of local black history called “The Heritage of Black Mississippi in the Fight for Freedom.”625 Sutton also wanted to commemorate the memory of past and present black leaders involved in the struggle, present entertainment stressing the importance of black history and culture, and work towards the goal of independence from white rule in Greenville.

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625 Thompson’s appointment inadvertently inspired Lawrence to establish the Deep South People’s History Project, which expanded the dramatic endeavor throughout the region, as well as co-edit five volumes of Mississippi slave narratives, which the WPA Federal Writers Project compiled in the 1930s. Greenwood Press published the complete collection of narratives under the title *The American Slave, a Composite Autobiography*. 
Since he believed that the Mainstream Festival was “entirely geared for white people,” Sutton decided to put on a “black folk festival” to provide “whites and blacks a chance to view some of the contributions blacks have made to American society through various exhibits” and the musical performances of three black bands. Hoping to stage the event at Strange Park, he appeared before the Greenville Park Commission, which allowed the DM to use the park, provided, of course, that the group clean up after the event.

The announcement of the separate black festival elicited a defensive response from the festival committee, which revealed a negative racial discourse associated with some forms of black music. Chairman Dave Thomas explained that the committee “tried to make it broad-based,” If folks looked at the “total presentation” and not focus on the headliners, he defended, “we have good music, popular music and country music, [and] you can see the versatility of the whole show.” Though they considered booking several black groups and entertainers, the committee ruled most of them out because their music was “not suitable for family entertainment.” One of the black groups considered too risqué, for example, was the British soul band Hot Chocolate, which had scored a megahit the previous summer with “You Sexy Thing.” The committee, however, considered acceptable the New Orleans style jazz of the Olympia Brass Band, which headlined the final night of the festival. It constituted the only significant “departure” from the traditional focus on country-and-western music, which, as one musicologist pointed out, also maintained historical associations with “poverty, low-class living, back alleys, hard drinking, and rough places.” While such attributes were also reflective of the blues music, the well-organized recording industry made sure to carefully construct a “clean image” of
country music artists in print media and on television. The mastery of such practices, therefore, allowed certain artists to remain acceptable as family entertainment.

Sutton’s criticism of the festival committee was supported by black business leaders as well as some cosmopolitan local whites. Ezzie R. Smith, one of two blacks on the chamber of commerce board of directors, agreed with Sutton that the festival was “not conducive to blacks.” Addressing the claim that more popular black entertainers were too expensive, he pointed out that the festival featured a few local black groups in 1974. He did not “enjoy country and western music” and stressed the importance of presenting black entertainers. Dorothy J. Smith, a black apartment complex manager, was “appalled” at the “very evident” exercise of “poor taste” in gearing the festival towards “only one segment” of the city’s population. She urged the committee to consider the demographics of the city and schedule less country and western music. Also taking aim at the committee’s excuse of high prices, Smith suggested conducting a more “diligent search” throughout the state, “or perhaps in our backyards [to find] groups that would coincide with the festival’s budget” and provide an infusion of “popular, jazz, soul, religious, classical, blues, etc.” Lori Rennick, a local white woman, questioned the overwhelming amount of country and western music, as young folks would enjoy “some hard rock or just rock-n-roll groups for the festival.” She lampooned “this bull” about “family entertainment,” complaining about the lack of good entertainment for the young people. Even

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627 Ezzie R. Smith was a native of Greenville, but he graduated from Medill High School in Chicago. He also graduated from the Aeronautical University of Chicago, where he majored in draftsmanship and engineering. In addition, he took additional college courses at the University of Tokyo and the University of Wisconsin. Having served in the U.S. Army during World War II, he started to work as a general contractor and operated the E.R. Smith Construction Company since 1949. In 1971, he launched a failed bid for the at-large seat on the city council. In March 1973, Smith became the first African American appointed to the executive committee and board of directors; see, “An Open Letter from Ezzie R. Smith,” DDT, Dec 5, 1971, p.5; “Vickery Picks Black,” DDT, Mar 15, 1973, p.5.
Mayor Bill Burnley “privately criticized” the committee for not booking “something more raucous like the Hot Chocolates.”

The festival committee ended up taking the advice of Ezzie Smith, hiring some local groups and expanding the lineup to twenty-two acts. Despite the prominence of country musicians, the revised concert series featured performances by twenty other musical groups representing various genres over the course of the six-day event.

June 30—The Navy Band and Today’s Teens, a singing group organized at Spartanburg First Baptist Church
July 1—The Black Rose Band, which consisted of musicians from local high schools, performed soul music, the Tramps, a local group, danced in between the artists, and LaCosta Tucker delivered the final performance of the evening—5,000 people
July 2—Flea Market, the 12-member Edwardians, Jerry Reed—10,000
July 3—The Mod Musicians (local soul music), Gary Mack and the Emeralds, Tramps (local dance troupe), Flea Market, water sports, and Brenda Lee
July 4—Bicentennial Salute with U.S. representative David Bowen (event rained-out and moved to First Baptist Church) Sam Epps and his Gospel Voices; The Creations
July 5—Rock band Marc Twain and Dusk with Sundance; The Olympia Brass Band, The Loretto Hilton Theatre Group; St. Louis Ragtimers Band

The controversy over the event helped to attract a crowd of 3,500 (ten percent black) people on opening night, “the biggest opening night in the five year history of the festival,” which featured the “weakest of the six days of entertainment.” The seven-man, one-woman Navy Band performed and Today’s Teens, a 110-member church choir, came to the city as part of its 10-day, 3,000 mile tour. Despite their fatigue after arriving from Fayetteville, Tennessee and performing at a local church, the large troupe dressed neatly in red-checked shirts and blue

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629 *DDT*, June 20, 1976, p.4.
bandanas and delivered a disciplined, well-organized performance of patriotic melodies and short plays in commemoration of the Bicentennial.\textsuperscript{631}

Sutton was forced to cancel the “black awareness festival” at Strange Park, because he lacked enough time to conceptualize and organize the event effectively. “We want to put on something that is more than music and dancing,” he informed, “We want to get some kind of message to the people.”\textsuperscript{632} Sutton had envisioned a festival that challenged the negative racial stereotypes of African Americans through a series of exhibitions depicting the struggles and contributions of black folks in America. Not only did he hope to influence the opinions of local whites, he also wanted to educate local blacks and instill pride in history of African Americans. Even though the separate black festival never materialized in the summer of 1976, Sutton had publicly challenged the white power structure, questioned the definition of “Mainstream USA,” and raised awareness among local citizens. He highlighted the historical silences and lack of exhibitions of black culture in Greenville, for they served as powerful tools to shape local opinions and attitudes towards black culture in the Delta. Sutton’s militant criticism exposed the practice of racial discrimination at the Mainstream Festival and inspired the blossoming of black cultural exhibitions in the late 1970s.

By putting pressure on the festival committee to include a more diverse lineup as well as more local talent, Sutton also helped attract between five and six thousand people to hear the soul music of the Black Rose Band, which consisted of musicians from local high schools and opened up for headliner LaCosta Tucker. The next night, the local black soul band, the Mod Musicians, opened for headliner Brenda Lee. By adding local black and white bands to the lineup, the festival committee managed to attract a larger and more diverse group of people to

downtown Greenville. Most of the estimated thirty thousand people who attended the festival “watched the acts and then [went] home to a comfortable night’s sleep,” but one local journalist noted that some of them camped out on the levee. While rookie concertgoers and enthusiastic spectators crowded onto the “uncomfortably hard levee,” a host of several, more experienced attendees watched the festival from different vantage points, such as one of the dozens of rafts and boats tied up behind the stage. After three nights of country music, the final night of the festival closed out with jazz and soft rock music. Marc Twain and Dusk, a soft rock group which modeled itself after Tony Orlando and Dawn, performed along with a similar group called Sundance, and the headliner was the Olympia Brass Band.

The criticism and separate promotional efforts of Sutton as well as the corrective additions of the festival committee increased regional interest and local support for the 1976 MSF, which attracted in upwards of 30,000 people over six-days—a new record in attendance for the annual celebration. While the performances of popular country musicians once again drew large crowds of people into Greenville, the GCOC recognized the potential impetus of scheduling headliners who represented a wider range of popular musical styles. The much-maligned Mainstream Festival, nevertheless, proved one of the leading accomplishments of the GCOC in 1976. One member of the chamber believed it attracted in upwards of one hundred thousand people to Greenville over 4th of July weekend. Its annual concert series on Lake Ferguson went a long way towards boosting the image of the city, which, in his opinion, became famous in the region for its annual celebration.

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634 “Festival ’76 is Now Memories,” DDT, July 6, 1976, p.1.  
INCREASINGLY DIVERSE CONCERTS, STEADY ATTENDANCE, AND ULTIMATE DECLINE

In response to the numerous complaints that the festival catered to middle-class whites in its focus on country music, the GCOC moved to include a more diverse group of headlining artists in the concerts on the levee series. The chamber also needed a new chairman to implement its new plans for the Mainstream Festival. Not many folks coveted the much-maligned and precarious position, but one enthusiastic optimist and retail store manager named Benjy Nelken, whose family had owned and operated a unique general store called The Fair of Greenville since 1896, perceived the post as an opportunity to boost the retail economy and turn the city into the trade center of the mid-Delta. “I don’t believe the town itself at its present population can support all” the new retail outlets, he argued, but he believed the city’s “key” geographical location would make it easier to bring people into the Queen City.636 Nelken had returned to Greenville in the late 1960s with almost limitless ambition and some new ideas about updating the family store downtown. Having earned his bachelor’s degree in business administration while playing football on an athletic scholarship at the University of Mississippi, Nelken moved to New York City for a year and a half to work with Lord & Taylor’s executive training program.637 His wife, the former Susan Gordon, who earned a business degree from DSU, worked for a while as executive coordinator at Thomas Publishing Company in New York City. The couple returned to the Delta to expand the retail business in the late 1960s, mainly through the construction of two shopping malls—the 300,000 square-foot Greenville Mall at Bowman and Highway 1 and the even larger Mainstream Mall, which replaced the Thomas

637 Susie James, “Nelken’s Idol, Nelson,” DDT, June 29, 1980, p.11A.
Shopping Center at Highway 82 and Highway 1—opened the door for expansion in 1972.\textsuperscript{638} In addition to the original downtown location, Benjy and Susan Nelken opened up the Fair in the Mainstream Mall. After a couple years of “loyal and continued patronage” at both locations, the couple opened a third store in the Greenville Mall. The bold investments reflected the commitment of Benjy Nelken to his hometown as well as his confidence in local citizens.\textsuperscript{639}

Having so much invested not only in the stores but in his ability to promote the city in such a way that attracts visitors to spend money, make return trips to spend more money, and perhaps even consider moving their families and industries to the Delta, Nelken took control of organizing and booking talent for the concerts on the levee series. He conducted some research and reviewed planning strategies in the months leading up to the first meeting of the festival committee on March 24. For example, he dug up the financial statements for each of the previous festivals and plugged them into a spreadsheet to identify trends, determine their motives, and, if necessary, take corrective measures. The official numbers on City attorney Jerome Hafter, who sparked the late 1970s rejuvenation of the dormant Washington County Historical Association, emphasized the need for downtown merchants to participate directly on the festival committee.\textsuperscript{640} Nelken and Hafter considered the involvement of local businesses as crucial, targeting four local business leaders—Jay Stein, of Stein Mart; David Mosow, of Brown’s Bakery; Nathan Goldstein, of the Book Store; and Gus Johnson down at Jim’s Café—to sit on the committee and become more active in the trade promotion. The initiative increased the

\textsuperscript{639} “The Fair is Greenville,” \textit{DDT}, Aug 11, 1974, p.3.
\textsuperscript{640} “Historical Society Studies Mounds,” \textit{DDT}, Feb 18, 1977, p.3.
number of participating firms to almost ninety, which contributed to the largest festival budget to date: $38,000.\textsuperscript{641}

Citing an increase in expenses since 1973, Nelken believed it was a good time to request an additional $5,000 on top of its usual $10,000 it received from the city council. His timing was off, however, and the council voted not to allocate the additional funds. To pursue that $5,000, he decided to sell tickets to a second show each night at the National Guard Armory. For a nominal admittance fee of four dollars, the “nightcap” performances allowed people to hear each major artist in a “more intimate setting.”\textsuperscript{642}

Nelken intentionally booked a diverse group of entertainers over the five nights of the Mainstream Festival, but he also maintained that “the \textit{real} value of the festival” was that it provided the physical and rhetorical space to rebuild the relationship between the black and white communities and promote that image outside the city. “I’m not a professional promoter,” he admitted, and he did not have any particular interest in popularizing the artists who performed at the festival. Nelken was a businessman and citizen “only wanting to promote one thing—and that’s Greenville.” Since the MSF was the city’s only large-scale annual promotional campaign, he reached out to local businesses to increase the festival and sought to attract even larger crowds of people from outside the city. He also recognized the festival’s potential to not only shape the image of Greenville “across the state as a progress city,” but also provide social spaces for racial integration and “allow people, regardless of culture and status, to participate in an occasion that generates a feeling of goodwill and community or a spirit of ‘communitas.’”\textsuperscript{643}


\textsuperscript{642} The city council, however, approved $500 to match a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts grant for Otrabando, a floating theatrical group, which planned to perform in Greenville in the summer; see, “Council Gives Festival $10,000,” \textit{DDT}, April 6, 1977, p.11; “Festival Request Deferred,” \textit{DDT}, April 20, 1977, p.8.

goal, he removed the mechanisms that prevented marginalized groups from being attracted to and attending the concerts on the levee series.  First, he looked beyond the interests of the white middle-class and booked artists who represented several different musical genres to ensure that the “spectacular would be musically balanced” in 1977.  Second, Nelken declared that the “festival itself must keep its free admission” policy.  It might always have certain limitations as a free festival, he insisted, “but the idea that it’s free—that’s worth it.”

The celebration of American independence from colonial rule, however, never meant quite as much for blacks and Native Americans as it did for the white descendants of Europeans. While many African Americans have celebrated the national holiday with great vigor and made their communities “all life and light” with patriotic fervor, black author Paul Laurence Dunbar suggested, “we have done it all because we have not stopped to think just how little it means to us.” Indeed, at the turn of the twentieth century, the newspapers featured many stories on debt peonage in Alabama, which Dunbar lampooned as, “a new and more dastardly slavery…arisen to replace the old.” He believed it absurd for African Americans to celebrate Independence Day. When “the Constitution has been trampled underfoot, the rights of man have been laughed out of court, and the justice of God has been made a jest,” he exclaimed, all “for the sake of re-enslaving the negro,” it was indeed not the time, nor the occasion, for celebration.  It’s not even the time for reconciliation. Not yet, and not in a “place where a lot of things have changed but where the pain of the old hurts…flare anew,” re-inflicting the old injuries and undermining the accrued “potential for strengthening communal ties and uniting people.”

Despite the objections about the celebration of Independence Day, Nelken resigned himself to working within the framework of the existing Mainstream Festival. On Friday, July 1, the festival featured and all-day carnival, a flea market, the opening performance of the Navy rock band Atlantis, and Jackson-native Dorothy Moore, a “black soul singer” whose recording of “Misty Blue” had recently hit the platinum mark. Local journalists estimated that about six thousand people attended to the first of several concerts on the levee.\(^\text{647}\) On the second night, Nelken had booked a television star-turned-musician and his personal idol, Ricky Nelson. Though the twenty-year music industry veteran had not released many hit records since his 1961 release of “Travellin’ Man,” which reached #1 on the *Billboard* Hot 100, Benjy Nelken was sure that Nelson would be a hit in the Queen City. He convinced a local pilot to fly him up to the Memphis Airport so that he could meet and greet his musical idol, but Nelson was no fan of airplane travel, especially smaller planes that seated only a few passengers.\(^\text{648}\) Instead, he rode to Greenville isolated in a station wagon with his road manager, who, according to Nelken, “put up barriers” to all the “adoring Deltans,” insisting that his boss needed to get some rest before going on stage.\(^\text{649}\) In the mid-1970s, the very lavish, expensive lifestyle enjoyed by his wife and four children forced Nelson to engage in a relentless touring schedule, which put serious strain on his marriage and literally drove his wife to drink. Nelson was a couple of months away from a very public divorce that received major press coverage, dragging on for years, and left him financially devastated. He was no doubt preoccupied with trying to patch up his crumbling marriage. While the once-awestruck freshman chair of the festival committee was left wholly disillusioned and noticeably peeved about his idol’s “cardboard personality,” it was just another gig in a seemingly


\(^{649}\) Susie James, “Nelken’s Idol, Nelson,” *DDT*, June 29, 1980, 11A.
never-ending tour for Nelson, who gave a credible performance of old standards as well as new rock ‘n roll tunes. He told the crowd that he did not mind playing for “small audiences in off-beat towns,” such as Greenville.\textsuperscript{650} Then he moved on to the next show.

The headliner for the final night of the concert series was soft rock group Starbuck, whose debut single, “Moonlight Feels Right,” shot up as high as #3 on the \textit{Billboard} Hot 100 singles charts in 1976. Having come together from the remnants of a sunshine-pop group from Greenville called Eternity’s Children, Starbuck lead singer Bruce Blackmon had been a star athlete at Greenville High School, which compelled the mayor to honor him with a key to the city.\textsuperscript{651} The featured artists 1977 MSF were indeed more diverse than any of the prior festivals, and it proved another successful event that drew over twenty thousand people. The GCOC thanked all of its supporters “intelligent enough to know that bringing these thousands of people into Greenville” who served as more than a serious boost to the local economy, but also sent a powerful message to other cities in the Arkansas-Louisiana-Mississippi Delta. In their opinion, the festival demonstrated that “Greenville, Can Do It All.”\textsuperscript{652}

Nelken and the GCOC received some criticism about the festival and listened to the suggestions of several white and black Deltans, who forwarded a host of improvements. Most complaints regarded the poor nature of seating on the levee, the lack of rock ‘n roll artists, and

\textsuperscript{650} By 1975, following the birth of his last child, Nelson’s marriage deteriorated, and the press covered the events leading to his eventual divorce in 1982. Nelson’s wife wanted him to quit the music business and focus on acting, which meant he would also “spend more time at home.” The Nelson family, however, lived a lavish, expensive lifestyle, which left him no choice but to tour relentlessly; see, Joel Selvin, \textit{Ricky Nelson: Idol for a Generation} (Contemporary Books, 1990), 230, 236, 238, 251; \textit{DDT}, July 4, 1977, p.1.

\textsuperscript{651} Blackman and marimba player Bo Wagner, along with guitarist Johnny Walker, had experienced some success with the Mississippi-based “sunshine pop” group Eternity’s Children in the late 1960s. The group scored a Billboard Hot 100 hit with “Mrs. Bluebird” in the summer of 1968. It was not until 1974, however, that Blackman and Wagner formed the rock group “Starbuck” in Atlanta, Georgia in 1974. The group’s debut single, “Moonlight Feels Right,” reached as high as number three on the Billboard Hot 100 singles charts in 1976. Starbuck never managed to re-create the success of their debut, but several of their subsequent releases charted on the Billboard Top 100. Their 1977 release "Everybody Be Dancin’” reached thirty-eight.

\textsuperscript{652} “Festival Thanks,” \textit{DDT}, July 31, 1977, p.6.
the poor quality of the sound equipment. Twenty-two year old Janice Johnson thought the 1977 Mainstream Festival was much improved because it “had enough music to satisfy everybody,” but she complained about overcrowding and the weak amplifiers for the sound system; they were not “loud enough for the people in the back.” One critic, indeed, had to admit that “the scenery was incredible.” The floating musical performances on Lake Ferguson, after all, evoked a tranquil image of lanterns, levees, and the Mississippi River, a vivid visual aesthetic that certainly added to the concert experience. While most folks watched the concerts from afar and others sat comfortably in rafts and boats behind the stage, the majority of spectators crowded onto the “uncomfortably hard levee,” certainly one of the most consistent features at the concerts on the levee. The expectation of sitting on the hard-concrete wharf had grounded the annual event in that place, downtown on the levee in Greenville, since its inception.653

Since the GGOC had quelled most criticism about the diversity of music, as well as continued to draw large crowds even with a lineup not centered on country and western music, the chamber booked another diverse array of musical groups in 1978. More than two thousand people attended the live performance of a local band called Breezin’, which featured former Albert King drummer Theotis Morgan and played everything from rock, disco and soul, to country music. Performing some of the more popular hits of the day, the four-piece band inspired several young people to dance “up and down the levee throughout the show.”654 The Amazing Rhythm Aces, a progressive country band with a top pop and country hit, “Third Rate Romance,” also performed on Saturday night.655 The headlining performance of Chubby Checker was the highlight of the festival even though he largely performed popular tunes by the

654 A local band called Atlantis also performed each night of the festival.
Beatles, Glen Campbell, Fats Domino, and Elvis Presley. Yet, in the introduction music on his opening song, the “King of Twist” brought most of an estimated 15,000-person audience to their feet. Whether “dancing, shouting, or clapping their hands,” one attendee reported, “they didn’t sit or quiet down until the end of the show.” The police estimated that the Fourth of July crowd was probably the “largest attending any single night’s entertainment during the festival’s history,” over twenty thousand people, most of whom came down to the levee on the nation’s birthday to watch the fireworks and Elvis impersonator Bill Haney, of Blytheville, Arkansas.

The diverse group of popular entertainers once again attracted large crowds to Lake Ferguson, but problems, such as bad weather, pollution, electrical issues, and an inadequate firework show, plagued the 1978 Mainstream Festival. Due to thunderstorms and pouring rain on Friday evening, the chamber postponed the performance of William Bell until the following night. Just as he started to perform on Saturday, however, sparks of electricity from a blown transformer lit up the night sky and brought the music to a halt. Due to the quick work of the Mississippi Power & Light Company, the “patient and understanding” crowd of six thousand people only waited about a half hour for the return of Bell. The brief, lackluster display of fireworks further disappointed a host of people on the 4th of July. Though advertisements promised a fifty-minute spectacular of aerial explosions, the colorful blasts lasted only about fifteen minutes. The frustrated and “screaming crowd went so crazy” during the performance of Elvis Presley impersonator Bill Haney that when he failed to toss his scarves into the crowd, thirty-five people waded into the polluted waters of Lake Ferguson to grab them, cutting their feet on broken bottles that littered the bottom of the concrete wharf. As the injured souvenir seekers received medical attention, the crowd grew unruly and started spewing vitriolic insults at

Haney, who, in the opinion of one young veteran of Presley’s live shows, did not “look, act, or sing like Elvis.” Alongside the King, she charged, “this guy is nothing.”

It was also the first year the city council decided to issue permits to beer vendors, and the rampant consumption of alcohol elicited impassioned critiques of the festival atmosphere. The city council’s decision brought on the wrath of evangelical groups, such as the Washington County Baptist Association (WCBA), which equated the city’s tolerance of public drunkenness with the declining moral standards of society. In one concerned letter, the WCBA urged the city council to ban the sale of alcohol and return to a commitment to “wholesome entertainment” on the waterfront. Since its inception, they argued, the Mainstream Festival had welcomed people of all ages and enjoyed a reputation as being a “family affair.” The WCBA did not believe, however, that the presence of beer vendors and the prevalence of inebriated individuals, many of whom freely used “abusive language,” was “conducive to a family-type operation.”

Hoping to bring back the original “family-friendly” and “white-oriented” image of the festival, the leaders of the temperance crusade sent a message to the city council that reflected the underlying racial fears of old-line prohibitionists. Such movements against the evils of alcohol carried a racial discourse that struck fear into the hearts and minds of “church people” who sought to maintain segregation in social spaces and control the aspiring generation of young, militant, and better-educated black men.

Due to the compelling campaign of the WCBA, the city council decided not to issue licenses to sell beer in the future, which limited concession stand operators to selling hot dogs, hamburgers, popcorn, and soft drinks. The beer ban, however, did not restrict local

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restaurants from selling the golden elixir and, of course, concertgoers were free to carry in their own personal supplies. Thus, the actions of the city council did little to quell the fears of evangelicals and eliminate the presence of drunken concertgoers.

After four months of “wheeling and dealing,” Benjy Nelken managed to put together a diverse lineup of musical acts that promised to offer a little “something for everyone.”661 In addition to the “rock nostalgia” of Beatle Fever, Grenada-native and jazz saxophonist Ace Cannon, and the Cajun fiddling of Country Gator, he booked an 11-member soul/disco group called Fatback and veteran country singer Freddy Fender. The $35,000 budget of the GCOC, however, did not guard against another round of production problems, which, in turn, led to an even more disgruntled crowd. On opening night, the celebration started an hour late, because the promoters waited on a cable to come in through Southern Airways. Not once did the concerts begin as scheduled during the entire festival, due to equipment trouble on Saturday, the physical assault of a police officer on Tuesday, and an electrical outage on Thursday, the final night of the concert series. One man fell into the lake and almost drowned trying to retrieve a microphone and a fight caused an amplifier to fall on top of one woman. The police arrested six people through Saturday, five of which received public drunkenness charges. Each of them variously received additional charges of drug possession, carrying a concealed weapon, resisting arrest and creating a disturbance.662 “At least we’ve been consistent,” festival chairman Ben Nelken informed, trying to take it all in stride, “something’s screwed up every single night.”663 By featuring local bands as well as a diverse group of headlining artists, Nelken managed to attract well over 30,000 people to Greenville. The large group of out-of-towners, however, continued to

leave behind trash and debris, and some folks even tossed beer and soft drink cans into Lake Ferguson, which further polluted the waters. With an audience not “into anything but music,” many speakers and other entertainers “met with a good chorus of good-natured boos from the impatient crowd.” The hostile audience, for example, deeply embarrassed Greenville’s Miss Hospitality Donna Peacock. Utterly humiliated, she descended from the barge crying and shouting at her hecklers below.  

Even though the festival experienced steady growth and a measure of financial success over the past three years, 28 year-old Benjy Nelken had become fatigued and frustrated with all the problems associated with the large trade promotion. His three years as chairman had drained his enthusiasm somewhat, but the city council granted him an increase from ten to fifteen thousand dollars. In 1980, Nelken decided to hire the new local sound company of brothers Charles and Donnie Brown. The Guess Who and the Four Tops were the headliners and they attracted an estimated 35,000 people to the downtown levee. After some lackluster demonstrations in the past, Nelken hired the Zambelli Internationale Fireworks Manufacturing Company to provide all the pyrotechnics on Independence Day. Having put on explosive displays for Macy’s Fireworks on the Hudson as well as the Summer Olympics, Zambelli did not disappoint with its awe-inspiring colorful aerial blasts. Between explosions the crowd rewarded their efforts with “oohs and aahs” for a half hour. The Mainstream Festival had limped into the summer of 1980, but the celebration attracted a similarly large crowd of increasingly diverse composition.  

Following the 1980 MSF, one anonymous citizen sent a letter to GCOC chairman Tommy Hart attacking the character of Benjy Nelken as well as the diverse and outdated lineup.

665 Tom Bassing, “It Was Too Much Fun; So It Had To Go Away,” DDT, Aug 8, 2014.
of musical acts. Noting the lack of black sponsors, the unknown author wanted to know why they continued to book a “big Black oriented band.” The funds allocated for that purpose would be much better spent booking “two or three up and coming country or progressive country stars,” in the angry writer’s opinion, because it was “the type of music [enjoyed by] over 90% of the people” on the list of sponsors. The letter also revealed an underlying, yet salient, concern about the integrated crowd. Indeed, many people did not plan to attend in the future, partly due to the “crap that Nelken has lined up,” but mainly because the behavior of “young Blacks” seemed to get “worse every year.” To be clear, the author insisted that black folks showed up “every night regardless” of the artists on stage, and they “run over people physically and curse with abandonment.” The increasingly consistent, loud, and conspicuous presence of young blacks at the concerts was a result of the GCOC’s acquiescence to the demands of Don Sutton in 1976. Benjy Nelken organized a musical lineup more reflective of the tastes of all citizens, but the mere presence of blacks seemed an ominous threat to any “decent family,” which hoped to “enjoy the shows” and certainly not be around “them.”

The writing was on the wall for the campaign to transform Greenville in Mainstream U.S.A. Councilor Betty Ellis, who became the first woman elected city councilor in October 1967, felt the heat from many of her churchgoing constituents only days after Independence Day, and she requested that the city council drop the popular celebration from the budget.

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668 The first female candidate for councilor was Virginia K. Greer; she had worked as a teacher in Georgetown, Louisville, Indianola, and moved to Greenville in 1939 to work as a teacher at Carrie Stern School. Her father was a doctor in Greenwood and a friend of the late senator LeRoy Percy, and she believed that her strong political convictions and interest in local government made her an excellent candidate for councilor-at-large. In a speech announcing her candidacy, Greer admitted that she was open to the construction of an open-air theater in Greenville similar to the famous MOAT in Memphis; “Candidate makes Her Announcement,” *DDT*, Aug 31, 1949, p.1; Portia Frazier, “Greenvile Elects Woman to Council for First Time,” *DDT*, Oct 17, 1967, p.1.
Councilor Bob Morgan informed that the Mainstream Festival had grown so large that it cost the city over $5,000 in police overtime, and vice mayor Jerre Lane had been told by several merchants that they were against the week-long festival. The city council unanimously pulled the $15,000 plug on its Mainstream Festival as well as any Fourth of July waterfront celebration. According to festival chairman Benjy Nelken, the city’s hard cash contributions allowed him some leverage in negotiations and the means to pay artists in full after their performances. “We just can’t raise the money if the city doesn’t back us,” Nelken lamented in the wake of the council’s decision. “The city put up almost half the money this year,” and the additional $20,000 came from sponsoring merchants who counted on the festival as a way of “promoting the city.”

Even though he had recently received a vote of confidence from the National Retail Merchants Association, it did not matter in the least. “It’s poetic justice,” Nelken chortled, “the city’s voting to stop backing it, [and] it’s winning a national award.”

Geopolitical developments contributed to the demise of downtown Greenville. Due to, what President Jimmy Carter considered, “the greatest threat to peace since the second World War”—the Soviet Union’s 1979 massive invasion of Afghanistan—the United States placed an embargo on the immense grain purchases of the USSR and eventually boycotted the 1980 Olympics held in Moscow. His high profile sanctions brought swift repercussions of a most severe psychological nature, which impelled farmers, bankers, and consumers to start reigning in their spending. The “deadly, rapid-fire combination of embargo, truck deregulation and escalating fuel costs,” according to one Mississippi journalist, not only incited panic among farmers, but also threatened the thriving towboat industry in Greenville, which served as the

671 Ibid.
headquarters of 25 towboat companies that employed as many as three thousand workers.\textsuperscript{672} The grain embargo signaled the end of the farming boom of the 1970s as well as the ensuing bust, which stemmed from a series of interrelated factors—surplus crop production, rising land prices, high interest rates, the deepening debts of farmers, and federal cutbacks in government support from the fiscally-conservative administration of President Ronald Reagan.\textsuperscript{673} Though the Mississippi Economic Council (MEC) believed it was on the verge of an economic boom at the end of the decade, the state remained an unattractive location for many new and developing industries. Several of the emerging young leaders of the MEC cited the “almost intangible and often immeasurable problem” of the state’s negative image. Both externally and internally, it proved the fundamental “stumbling block” that discouraged industrial developers and big business from settling in the Magnolia State.\textsuperscript{674}

The more diverse concert lineups of the Mainstream Festival after the Bicentennial was attributed to negative press coverage and the increasing awareness of the lack of educational initiatives and exhibitions related to the history and culture of African Americans in the Delta. When the state of Mississippi observed Black History Month in 1976, Mound Bayou elementary school teacher Balwant Singh, a Sikh formerly of Punjab, India, realized that the public educational system was in dire need of a curriculum that proffered a feeling of mutual respect for the culture and heritage of other peoples.\textsuperscript{675} In one guest editorial, he opened with an expression of “reverence to the Negroes of this country as well as to the Negroes of the rest of the world who had suffered long and hard enough and had lost their precious lives to serve America in

\textsuperscript{672} Macey Baird, “Hanging Tough,” in \textit{What Ever Happened to Main Street?}, eds.Bill Rose and Garreth Blackwell (University, MS: Meek School of Journalism, 2011), 10.
\textsuperscript{673} Ibid., 10-11.
building the most industrial and powerful nation of the world.” Since they had “done so much [for] mankind’s progress from the time of creation up to now,” Singh maintained that the descendants of African nations not only deserved their “proper place” in United States history but also the history of world civilization. The state’s public schools, however, despite boasting an overwhelming black majority, lacked both the educational resources and the general motivation to offer much instruction in African American history. Believing that quality educational systems imparted students with “knowledge of their culture and of self,” Singh pitied the students in the Delta, who never learned about their position in society at large and, therefore, had little chance of relating to other cultures, much less making any significant educational progress.676

The lack of black participation in Greenville’s Bicentennial Celebration inspired a cultural renaissance among African Americans, many of whom realized that the dearth of programs and exhibitions dedicated to black culture and heritage had resulted in a lack of pride and self-esteem in the black community. While Don Sutton and other militants associated with the Delta Ministry decided to initiate projects to document the history of the civil right movement in Greenville, the growing concerns of black folks in other Delta counties fueled the cultural and public relations activities of Mississippi Action for Community Education (MACE), a community development organization which organized a series of celebrations that merged black political victories and social projects with the rich gospel and blues traditions in the Delta. In 1978, MACE established a new annual festival tradition in rural Washington County that departed from the more diverse musical lineups at the Mainstream Festival, specifically in its sole focus on the musical traditions of African Americans. The Delta Blues Festival also drew

from the earlier festival tradition on the levee through the interpenetration of race and place, which produced powerful myths and attracted tourists who, similar to visitors in the 1930s, had “not heard the originators of [the blues] sing in their own way the compositions now known over the earth.”

By organizing and displaying black communal projects, such as the Delta Cotton Maker’s Jubilee (DCMJ) and the Delta Blues Festival, African American producers intended to not only fill a perceived cultural void, but also refute racist, stereotypical representations of blacks and replace them with positive images that inspired self-esteem and pride amongst black folks in the Delta. MACE intended to regain control of the cultural and political identity of African Americans in the recreational spaces at the festivals. Not merely black alternatives to white-dominated events, not purely recreational nor wholly radical in nature, they provided a forum for introducing political strategies of resistance against the ever-vigilant, diabolically subversive, and at times violent and hostile white visions of the world.

CHAPTER FOUR

“NOT RICH, BUT REAL”: SARAH JOHNSON, BLACK POLITICAL POWER, AND THE (RE)CONSTRUCTION OF THE TOURIST LANDSCAPE IN GREENVILLE

“Black women must overcome being black and [being] a woman, and, in my case, being poor. When I started, I had nothing and I still don’t.”

Sarah Hutchinson Johnson
City Councilor
Greenville, Mississippi
Speaking at the National Women’s Conference in Houston, Texas
September 1977

On August 6, 1965, four and a half months after Bloody Sunday, Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, SNCC chairman John Lewis, and CORE director James Farmer stood on the rotunda of the U.S. Capital building and witnessed President Lyndon Johnson sign the last of the great laws to secure equal rights of citizenship for African Americans. In anticipation of the Voting Rights Act, the Mississippi Legislature approved a “simplified voter registration form” and blacks folks steadily made their way to the courthouse in Greenville. 617 blacks registered in the first month alone, and by the end of October, the number of registered black voters reached 3,841. Within a year, black voters held a majority in precincts one and five in Greenville, and 5,706 blacks had registered to vote in Washington County. African Americans made up almost half of the city’s population and almost sixty percent of the county in 1966, and the

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680 According to a report by the Voters Education and Registration Association (VERA), an organization established by local whites to encourage voter registration, there was 14,244 registered white voters in September 1966; see, “Negroes Have Out Registered Whites in Two City Precincts,” DDT, Sep 29, 1966, p.17.
increasing registration of black voters encouraged several prominent black leaders to seek office and make local government more representative of its population. In the city of Greenville, however, whites enjoyed a “liberal” reputation and benefitted from a discriminatory at-large voting system, which made it difficult for the black bourgeoisie to obtain political power. Factionalism among community organizations, divisions within the black community, and a lingering awareness of the penalties for blacks “who did not keep their place,” moreover, inhibited racial solidarity and resulted in almost a decade of failed bids for municipal office.681

With over half the city’s population living below the poverty line in 1973, the twin prongs of double-digit inflation and economic recession set the stage for the emergence of a poor, black professional and mother of four named Sarah Johnson, whose gritty, grassroots campaign for a seat on the city council garnered widespread support in the black community as well as public endorsements from liberal whites. Her victory in the race for the vacated seat of twenty-year councilor Sam Smith gave voice to all the people who had lacked access to the halls of power since southern political redemption in the mid-1870s.

The most impressive achievement of her early political career was turning public opinion against the establishment of a civic center in downtown Greenville. In one of the most contentious debates of her campaign, Sarah Johnson took a firm stand against spending five million dollars in revenue sharing funds on a civic center large enough to hold forty thousand people and host all forms of popular entertainment. “How can we talk of spending money for a civic center,” she asked, “when we continue to leave unsolved problems with our schools, our streets and other public facilities, our health standards?”682 Rather than building “piles of stone” for local elites, she wanted to narrow the gap in city services “between those that have, and those

that have not.” Besides, the Greenville Chamber of Commerce had used the levee and the Downtown Shopping Park to “great advantage” as the site of the Mainstream Festival, which, in her opinion, proved that the city could “stage a successful musical event without a civic center.”

The concerts on the levee series pulled people into Greenville “from miles around,” she argued, “even though none of the entertainment had local identification.” In her fight against the civic center and her cursory examination of underutilized community resources, she realized that people all over the world celebrated a musical style “conceived and developed by Deltans” and “sung by musicians” who lived among them, “many unknown to their neighbors” and “too long taken for granted.” 683 In a statement released from her office on December 5, 1973, Johnson proposed that the “staging of an annual Delta Blues Festival, using the same community resources which produced the Mainstream Festival,” would draw many people willing to pay “exorbitant prices” into downtown Greenville to honor, what Mexican music producer Raul de la Rosa considered, “one of the fundamental musical cultures of this century: the blues.” 684

Sarah Johnson made an almost immediate impact through her campaign against the civic center. Despite dubious “surveys” purporting to show overwhelming support and a council majority willing to allocate federal revenue-sharing funds to the project, Johnson continued to oppose the center, going so far as to organize revenue sharing workshops to educate the public about the potential utilization of the funds.685 Bringing the black and liberal white communities

684 Raul de la Rosa was the organizer of the 1978 Mexico City Blues Festival, which developed into—not an annual—but a periodic celebration of the blues; see Luis Eduardo Alcantara, “Octavo Festival de Blues en Mexico,” Conecte (1993) “Subject File: Mexico Blues Festival,” Blues Archive, University of Mississippi.
685 Though economist Walter Heller is considered the father of modern revenue-sharing, the concept had a series of champions in politics, beginning with former Representative Melvin Laird, who advocated revenue-sharing in 1958. The idea remained popular among politicians in the 1960s, and Richard Nixon even promised to make revenue-sharing a top priority in his campaign for president in 1968. He sent legislation to Congress, but other priorities ensured it never left Capitol Hill. It was New York governor Nelson A. Rockefeller, in fact, who convinced the president to make revenue-sharing “the major thrust” of his domestic program in 1972. It continued in varied capacities over the next fourteen years. Every community had to hold public hearings on how the money would be
together behind the Greenville Public Information Alliance, Johnson forced the city to have a referendum on the civic center, which, in addition to the onset of a recession, ultimately forced the council to focus on the more pressing needs in the city.

As the prospects for the civic center faded in Greenville, the Washington County Board of Supervisors decided to expand the open-air show building at the fairgrounds. The renovated and renamed Washington County Exposition Center (WCEC) attracted a host of aspiring concert promoters willing to gamble and bring in popular entertainers in the mid-1970s. Though the lackluster amenities of the expo building received much criticism from promoters, some of whom deemed it inadequate in times of extreme heat or cold, the successful promotion of the International Blues Festival at the WCEC in November 1976 demonstrated that a lineup of popular blues musicians could attract a large crowd of people in the mid-Delta, regardless of the conditions. The profitable event also substantiated the earlier claims of Sarah Johnson, who suggested the economic impetus of celebrations focused on the local blues tradition. While the staging of blues festivals came to make a serious economic impact in Washington County beginning in the late 1970s, the burgeoning tourist industry developed largely outside of the city, divorcing itself from city’s festival tradition on the levee and alienating the downtown business district. Sarah Johnson The increasing popularity of the Delta Blues Festival, along with the discontinuation of the Mainstream Festival in 1980, diverted much-needed revenue away from already-dying businesses in downtown Greenville.

Mayor Pat Dunne announced that “everyone in Greenville lost a friend” in city councilor-at-large Robert Allen “Skeeter” Blackmon, who died from a heart attack on December 18, 1986.
The sudden passing of the city councilor-at-large prompted the city to hold a special election to fill his unexpired term on January 16. Nine candidates in total eventually qualified for the special election, including Mike Ward, promoter of the 1970 Delta Festival, who shaved his beard and cut his long hair upon learning of Blackmon’s death. He worked as a computer operator at First National Bank, and the bank’s president believed that his bid for city councilor “was in conflict with the best interests of the bank,” as the maintenance of its computer system required “full-time attention.” Though he did not believe that his employer had the right to impede his bid for public office, Ward had to make a choice, either work for the bank or run for public office. He chose to run, quit his bank job, and went to work for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which paid him minimum wage to clean and repair disaster mobile homes at the Air Force base. While the energetic and idealistic young man would not fare well in the election, garnering a measly six votes, his decision to run in the election propelled him into a “leadership role” in regards to “community service and development.” He subsequently worked with the Washington County Voter Registration Project (WCVRP) and served as chairman of the Washington County Council on Human Relations (WCCHR). As vice-president of the Mid-Delta chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Mike Ward showed enough “potential leadership talent” that the Ford Foundation awarded him one of twenty Leadership Development Program (LDP) fellowships in May 1973. By the end of the year, he came back to Greenville and proved a political ally, working as the only white staff member at MACE.

688 Joseph Harris, Donald Sutton (Yacub X), and Ward were among 20 persons in the southeast United States to receive the fellowships because of their “leadership role and the interest they have shown in educational improvement, community service and development;” they travelled throughout the nation and worked with “noted authorities who are presently directing and-or coordinating various educational projects and-or community programs,” in an effort to develop educators and others who have shown potential leadership talent. The fellows
Sarah H. Johnson, the local Head Start director for the Washington County Peoples Education Program (PEP), filed her qualifying papers with the city clerk in late December, and she also entered the race for city council. The 34-year-old mother of four was the only black candidate in the race, and she believed that the citizens of Greenville wanted the “city government to be representative of all people.” She supported programs for “industrial development, public housing, slum clearance and prevention, recreation for youth and programs for the aged,” but she remained open to any other programs that served the best interests of the city. Invoking a blue collar image, Johnson paid for her own political advertisements and offered free rides to the polls, declaring that to make the council more representative of the people, “Vote for Yourself—Vote for Sarah Johnson—Not Rich, But Real.” In one interview, she described her decision to run for office as a religious calling to action:

Out of the clear blue, I have to say, I had a calling just like my husband said he was called to the ministry. Out of the clear blue something or someone said to me, ‘It’s time.’ I had watched eight or nine blacks who had run for public office and they had lost every time...That meant to me it was time to get a black elected to the City Council.

Indeed, it was time and she was ready for the challenge. Nurtured by her family and teachers, Johnson’s pursuit of what was possible as a black woman began during childhood. It required that she adhere to a strict code of social behavior at school and at home, dictated not so much by personal tastes or tendencies as by race and gender stereotypes, particularly judgements

returned to their home communities at the end of that time to “communicate new theories and techniques to others in their school or community”; DDT, Mar 9, 1973, p.9; “3 Get Fellowships,” DDT, May 3, 1973, p.29.
691 Sarah H. Johnson, interview by Tom Healy, September 10, 1978, Greenville, Mississippi, Center for Oral History & Cultural Heritage, University of Southern Mississippi.
about the morality of black women. A radical Methodist, Sarah Johnson certainly embraced a discourse on black womanhood that ascribed self-worth and respectability as well as emphasized achievement in both the public and private spheres. From the beginning of her campaign, she made it clear that her background and work experience since coming to the Delta had prepared her to deal with local issues as a member of the city council. By cultivating a positive image as an agent who drew power from individual achievements and connections to the larger community, Sarah Johnson challenged so many of the deeply-embedded stereotypes of black women in American culture during her tenure on the city council.

On March 11, 1938, Sarah Hutchinson (Johnson) was the fourth of four children born out of wedlock to Louisa Hutchinson in the small fishing town of Awendaw, South Carolina. Though she never knew her biological father, she distinctly remembered growing up in the “ghetto houses,” which stood only a couple inches apart, in Charleston with her stepfather, Jim Hughley, who raised her until the age of five. After the baby of her stepfather’s sister died, she went to live in the home of her aunt and uncle in the more industrial city of Anniston, Alabama. “Life was pretty rough” in the beginning, because her uncle was what she considered a “weekend drunk,” who would get “all liquored up” and want to go “out and shoot somebody.” Until her uncle died, they lived on the “edge of disaster” every weekend, and she spent much of the time “huddled on the back porch.” Her aunt, on the other hand, was very religious and strict about her upbringing, making her attend Sunday School and church as well as encouraging her involvement in the church choir and the high school band. Her aunt also stressed the importance of doing well in school and going to college. “She wanted me to do

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better than she had done,” Johnson explained, “She didn’t want me growing up being somebody’s maid and, you know, not having the better things out of life.”

After graduating valedictorian of the Cobb Avenue High School class of 1957, she moved to Atlanta, Georgia to attend Clark College, but after one year she got married to a ministerial student, Ned Howard Johnson. For the next three years, the couple remained in Atlanta while he finished his degree at Gammon Theological Seminary. He obtained a position at a private black high school in Brewton, Alabama in 1960, but the work of a religious director proved difficult for the young minister, who resigned his post before the end of the school year. The couple moved into his grandmother’s house in Wheeling, West Virginia, and over the next few years, Ned Johnson moved the family around the state of West Virginia served at three different churches in the cities of Clarksburg, White Sulfur Springs, and Ronceverte. Sarah Johnson, however, quickly grew “dissatisfied” with such an itinerant lifestyle; she wanted her husband to find a good church and serve as its full-time pastor.

Having heard about the needs of a church in Greenville, he visited Calvary Presbyterian Church and delivered a sermon in June 1964. “The people liked him,” she recalled, so he came back to Ronceverte and told her he wanted to move to Mississippi. At the time, however, three civil-rights workers had been killed in Philadelphia, Mississippi. To her it seemed like “every time you turned the television on, you would be seeing something about Mississippi or something about some place in the deep South.” At the mere thought of moving to such a place, she almost broke down and told “him he had to be crazy coming to Mississippi.” She was not happy about the prospect of living in the Magnolia State, but after visiting the church and

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meeting the people, the couple made a decision to relocate the family to Greenville in the fall of 1964. In a vehicle loaded down with all their earthly belongings, they experienced the ardent temperament of southern hospitality towards blacks with out-of-state license plates:

As we entered Greenville, just before we got to the city limits, someone drove up beside our car and shot through the window—not in the window either, sort of toward the sky. Of course it frightened us, but we were prepared for that because we had read about a whole lot of things happening. You know how people with tags on their cars from elsewhere would come into the state and they were considered as foreigners and whatnot. We didn’t consider that a very good welcome, but we knew then that we were in Mississippi.698

More angered than intimidated by the violent encounter, Ned Johnson almost immediately immersed himself in the civil rights activities of the Washington County Employment Committee (WCEC), a local activist group which developed out of a meeting of black women who had grown disgruntled over the hiring practices at the Greenville Mill. Founded and organized into a negotiating committee, made up of several prominent local black men and a picketing committee with dozens of black women, the WCEC called for the mill to hire more black women and promote qualified black men. The managers had promised to hire black women, but they only recently hired five in comparison to 350 white women, and black men continued to work in menial, low-paying jobs despite being qualified for promotions. In February 1965, Ned Johnson and mortician James Edwards, who appeared before the civil rights commission in Jackson the previous week, as well as Bettye Grayson, Bernadine Young, and Johnnie Fuller, signed an open letter to mill manager W.T. Wilcox calling for more direct action protests against the discriminatory hiring practices at the Greenville Mill.699

698 Ibid.
Unable to get the mill to negotiate, the WCEC moved forward with plans to picket the factory. About thirty people a day came out to picket for the next three months, until the federal government threatened to pull their contracts unless the mill dealt with racial discrimination. As talks between the mill and the negotiating committee dragged on, the women in the picketing committee found their voice and agency in moving against the black business leaders, calling for an end to talks, and filing a lawsuit against the mill. Eventually, due to pressure from the federal government and the lawsuit, Greenville Mills agreed to employ an equal number of black and white women, promote qualified black men, and desegregate the snack room and water fountains.700

The Mississippi Sovereignty Commission (MSC) took notice of Ned Johnson’s arrival and immediate activism in Greenville, which led investigators to believe he had been receiving funds from a “subversive group.”701 Indeed, he worked alongside Rev. Arthur Thomas, director of the Delta Ministry, a church-related civil-rights organization similar to SNCC and COFO and funded by the National Council of Churches, and he confronted the local power structure about the hiring of blacks in local businesses and municipal government. When the first poverty program needed a qualified director in Greenville, Ned wanted to apply for the job, but the employment service denied him an interview, arguing that he could not pastor the church and direct an anti-poverty program. The decision made him furious as well as determined to get an interview—regardless of its outcome. His small salary as pastor, however, was subsidized by the white Presbyterian Church, which decided not to sanction the black minister taking a leadership role in local anti-poverty efforts. If he took the job, his congregation informed that they would dissolve his relationship with the church. According to Sarah Johnson, her husband’s association

with the DM was the reason he “felt so strongly [about] having blacks at the top” of anti-poverty programs.\textsuperscript{702}

After all “the pressure that he applied,” Ned Johnson became the local administrator of the Neighborhood Youth Corps, an OEO program designed to make it possible for youths, ages 16 to 21, to stay in school, return to school if they dropped out, or obtain work experience and develop work skills while completing useful tasks and improving facilities for the public benefit.\textsuperscript{703} After he accepted the position, the church ended his tenure as pastor of Calvary Presbyterian, which made a noticeable impact on his psychological well-being. He had come to Greenville in part to join the church’s “program for change,” and he struggled without the support of his congregation. He started to drink. Before long, it began to affect his administration of the NYC. In the summer of 1966, several of the young participants in the program allegedly punctured the tires of several wheel barrows and tossed several tools into Deer Creek. According to affidavits of the fourteen young men who participated in the NYC program, Ned Johnson became enraged and demanded that each of them pay him fifteen dollars, or he would send them to prison for destroying federal property.\textsuperscript{704} The affidavits led to criminal charges against Johnson, which sent the preacher on a downward spiral and landed him in a mental hospital. Sarah Johnson remembered all too well her tumultuous experiences growing up with her alcoholic uncle, and she refused to expose the couple’s four children to such chaos. Due to his troubles with alcoholism, she divorced her husband and retained sole custody of their children in July 1967.

\textsuperscript{702} Sarah Johnson, interview, September 10, 1978.
\textsuperscript{703} The activities were supposed to be designed and administered by local people, for the benefit of our local people. The work project also provided youths some income over the summer; see, “Mayor Dunne Explains Local Poverty Battle,” \textit{DDT}, Apr 28, 1965, p.1.
Sarah Johnson did not get involved in the movement quite as quickly as her husband, because she initially worked a year in the public school system. The position, however, did not pay very much, and even though the school offered her a small raise, she turned it down and applied for a job at Greenville Mill, where the successful campaign of the WCEC almost guaranteed employment for black women. “I was going to be hired,” she explained, “except the personnel director called me and addressed me by my first name and I corrected him.” She believed that the brief moment of assertiveness doomed her previously all-but-certain chances of getting the job. “That was the end of that,” she lamented, “I didn't get the job.”

The Child Development Group of Mississippi (CDGM), however, the first Head Start preschool education program in the state, started in the summer of 1965, and she served as the CDGM center director at the Calvary Presbyterian Church. The job only lasted about two months, and she had to take another job as a recruiter secretary for Systematic Training and Redevelopment (STAR), an experimental War on Poverty program designed to provide basic education for adults and re-locate them to regions in need of unskilled and semi-skilled labor. Not long after starting at STAR, the executive secretary quit and Johnson had to do her job while the boss searched for a replacement. “He wanted a male,” she recalled, but all of the available men—white males specifically—wanted high salaries. Though she felt like he had denied her an opportunity to move up for several months, she eventually received a promotion to executive secretary and worked in that capacity until the program shut down in November 1967, at which time she went to work as a secretary for McKinley Martin and the Delta Opportunities Corporation (DOC). One of several offshoots of the DM, the DOC served as a receiving agency

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705 Operated by the Roman Catholic diocese of Mississippi, STAR established training centers in Carthage, Philadelphia, Meridian, Yazoo City, Greenwood, and Greenville, which recruited six thousand families for the relocation and employment program in its initial four years; see, “Trial Project will Re-Locate Mississippians,” *BRA*, July 5, 1966, p.30.
for federal and private grant funds to provide housing, education, and vocational training for seventy-five families on four hundred acres of land south of Greenville, which became known as Freedom Village.\textsuperscript{706} The DOC offices were located downstairs from the offices of the DM. One day, the DM needed someone to type thirty pages overnight so that it could be sent to Europe the next day. After hearing that she had pretty good typing skills, the DM recruited her for the project and she “stayed up most of the night” typing the long document. The DM was so impressed with the neatly-typed document that she dropped off the next morning that they offered her a full-time staff position. Her prompt decision to start working for such “inspiring people,” she maintained, offered her an education on the important issues in local politics and marked the beginning of her direct involvement in the black freedom struggle.\textsuperscript{707}

Johnson exhibited a marked disdain for male chauvinism. It cost her more than one job over the years, but she managed to hold down her position working for the DM director of interpretation until 1971. The ecumenical organization experienced a major disruption in funding in early 1971, and DM director Owen Brooks fired Johnson for insubordination. The entire staff of the DM was eventually cut to four people, including Brooks, and it was clear Johnson was going to lose her job anyway. She considered her firing inappropriate, however, and branded Brooks as a male chauvinist. “You know,” she explained, “he was the kind of a person that wanted his employees to work, but then when it came to whether you had an opinion or not about certain things, it didn’t matter.” She worked for Rev. Henry Parker, director of interpretation, and one day, while he was out of town, Brooks asked her to type up some letters for the project at Freedom Village. She did not have time to get to them done before leaving that day, and Brooks typed up a letter firing her for insubordination and walking off the job. When

\textsuperscript{707} Sarah Johnson, interview, September 10, 1978.
Rev. Parker returned and showed her the letter. Johnson was furious and appealed to the National Council of Churches (NCC) for a fair hearing about her termination. In the meantime, Brooks fired all but the top four employees of the DM due to the NCC’s drastic cuts in funding. Though the NCC expunged her record of the termination, Johnson did not return to work for Brooks. In fact, she would not speak with him again until her second campaign for city council in late 1973.

Around this time, Johnson started making a few changes in her life. She started to become more involved in the church as well as some activist groups on the national level. She moved her church membership to Revels Memorial United Methodist Church (UMC), where she served as director of the children’s choir became quite popular due to her very public repudiation of Owen Brooks. The United Methodist Church elected her to serve on the Board of Church and Society as well as with its new Division of Emerging Social Issues. Johnson was also a national board member of Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCR), a caucus of black members within the United Methodist Church (UMC), which, beginning in 1968, fought for justice, equality and black power within the segregated structure of the church. In the wake of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., the 10.3 million-member Methodist Church completed its extended merger negotiations with the three-quarters of a million-member Evangelical United Brethren, which led to the creation of the UMC. The Methodist Church had also taken major steps towards eliminating the all-black Central Jurisdiction by integrating the predominantly white church conferences. In response to James Forman’s Black Manifesto in 1969, several different conferences donated large sums of money to the BMCR to further the

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black liberation struggle by making the United Methodist Church “recognize and deal with the needs and aspirations of her black constituents.”

After leaving the DM, Johnson took a minimum wage job with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), helping people recover from a series of tornados that terrorized the region and left hundreds homeless. She soon left HUD and accepted her first significant position as an administrator. Johnson was hired as the new Headstart director of the People’s Education Program in Washington County, which put her in charge of over 129 employees, as many as 704 children, and a budget of about $700,000. “All of those children were black,” she recalled, “We did not have any white children in the program.” Due to high volunteer numbers, Johnson operated seven centers across the county as well as two mobile classroom units to maximize the involvement parents and the local community.

The following year Johnson arranged for the children in Washington County Head Start programs to take swimming lessons. The program was designed by A.D. Jackson, director of Katie Lewis swimming pool, to allow over one hundred five year-olds a chance to practice their “kicking, floating, and sinking,” as well as cool off from the summer heat of the Delta.

In 1971, Johnson applied for a fellowship at the Institute of Politics (IOP) in Jackson, a non-profit and nonpartisan education and research project sponsored by Loyola University in New Orleans. Though unsuccessful at first, she applied the following year and was one of twenty-three men and women in the state to participate in the program, a series of 31 seminar

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714 Head Start students in Hollandale, Glen Allen, Tribbett, Leland, and Greenville daily converge on the pool in different groups for one-hour sessions. “Out of the seven years we have had Head Start centers in Washington County, this is one of the best projects we have undertaken. The kids love it.” The lessons continued through the summer; see, “In the Swim,” DDT, July 23, 1972, p.33.
sessions—led by leading national, state, and local campaign specialists and politicians—
“designed to provide practical political training for present and future political leaders.”\footnote{715}{“DD-T Writer to Seminars,” \textit{DDT}, Aug 13, 1972, p.10.} The fellowship required her to attend seminars and listen to politicians “talk about how they won their campaign, or how they lost for whatever reasons…how they did voter registration drives.” Johnson had some experience with voter registration campaigns while working for the DM, but she never felt a burning desire to enter the political arena. Having “‘really liked” what she heard in some of the seminars, she developed a new attitude, a new sense of confidence and enthusiasm for politics. Johnson developed strong feelings about the systematic exclusion of women from high politics. She saw no problem with it; in fact, she stressed her important role as a mother of four children as one of her greatest assets. “As a mother,” she believed she possessed a natural ability to understand “the problems of children in school, teenagers and young adults—being able to relate to them and their problems and their needs.” By taking on public leadership roles in the community, she wanted to encourage women to engage politics, “to move out a little bit more in all areas” previously off-limits to them.\footnote{716}{“Now There are Two,” \textit{DDT}, Jan 28, 1973, p.8.} The death of councilor Blackmon during her time in the inspiring fellowship provided an opportunity to encourage women to challenge the gendered restraints in society by qualifying to run in the special election for city councilor in January 1973.

Johnson won the special election with 1,415 votes, but an affluent land developer named Gerald Abraham came in second with 1,283. The race was so close that it called for a run-off election between the two candidates on January 30.\footnote{717}{“Johnson, Abraham Win,” \textit{DDT}, Jan 24, 1973, p.12.} “So we regrouped our organization,” she recalled, and focused on “getting the word out to the people that we were going to have another
election.”  

Johnson also continued her grassroots speaking campaign. “Poor people and people who have no voice in government, people who make up the masses and never have been on a decision making level—I know how they feel,” Johnson stated, but she was a hard-worker and determined to make an impact in the administration of the city council. Considering blacks made up half the population in the Queen City, she believed it was “far past time that blacks” had representatives on the city council. “I feel good about being a black candidate,” she asserted, because African Americans had long needed a sympathetic ear in local governance. Though she gave lip service to her high hopes for the future of the city, she expressed much concern about affluent whites who moved out of the city, leaving it to deteriorate without a solid tax base.

Abraham won the runoff election (3,516 to 2,358) and took his seat on the city council. While disappointed and upset that many voters cast their ballot along racial lines, Johnson remained optimistic and expressed her gratitude for the groundswell of support in her bid for a seat on the city council. “At that time I felt and my supporters felt that I lost to Gerald Abraham because the election became a racial thing,” Johnson admitted, but she remained determined to impact the local political environment. The “enthusiasm, hard work, support and votes” of 2,358 people made a clear statement about the desire to have more representative city government. Since “representative government” was guaranteed in the Constitution, Johnson exclaimed, “We shall have it for I am dedicating my life to get it.” An inspirational figure, she spoke with a special ferocity and possessed a radical streak—so reflective of the FDP—which

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720 Ibid.
721 “Community Center Box Puts Him In,” DDT, Jan 31, 1973, p.2.
722 Ibid.
helped to establish a broad, yet brief, alliance between conservative and more militant blacks to gain political power in Greenville.

The black community needed solidarity more than ever after Johnson’s defeat due to the imperatives of getting all previously registered black voters to do it all over again. In late February, the city council decided to purge the registration books and make every city resident re-register to vote. The purged rolls contained the names of twelve thousand people, according to City Clerk Lloyd Lancaster, many of whom had died or moved out of town. 723 Purging the voter rolls ensured that only people who met the registration requirements could vote in local elections. 724 It also left only eight months to get everyone registered again. Sarah Johnson, in one letter to the editor, argued that many elderly citizens did not want to make another trip to city hall. Under the current system of registration, the physical handicaps of citizens served as a way of stripping them of the franchise. To avoid keeping a “sizeable number of citizens from being able to vote in future elections,” she argued, the city needed to utilize certain methods to speed up the registration process, such as going door-to-door and scheduling registration drives in certain neighborhoods. Though she waited and hoped the council would advocate such expedient registration programs, the city council did not take any steps to make voter registration more convenient for citizens in Greenville. The total number of eligible voters in the city was 15,000, but only 8,000 people had registered to vote in mid-August.

Immediately after the city called for the re-registration of all residents, Sarah Johnson convinced three institutions—Revels Memorial United Methodist Church, the Herbert Lee Memorial Center, and the Delta Ministry—to combine forces and establish the Citizens for Community Action, which embraced a tripartite mission: 1) to increase the number of registered

voters, 2) assist in the re-registration of city residents, and 3) conduct citizenship education in the process.\textsuperscript{725} The group, therefore, submitted a grant in the name of Revels Memorial United Methodist Church to conduct a black-oriented voter registration drive in Greenville. Coming from the Commission on Religion and Race of the United Methodist Church, the $4,000 grant was the first ever awarded to a local church to register black voters. The funds provided for a coordinator, part-time canvassers, and transportation for potential voters to and from city hall.\textsuperscript{726} “We requested the grant to try to encourage blacks to get out and vote,” Johnson informed, and the CCA focused its efforts all around the city, except for the southern end, which was almost all white.\textsuperscript{727} The CCA also sponsored concerts that featured young spiritual singers and invited all senior citizens of the city to attend the Brent Community Center on August 28, 1973.\textsuperscript{728}

Being so caught up in the spirit of her political mission, Johnson got the feeling that some black folks had given up on politics. African Americans had cast thousands of votes since the passage of the 1965 Voting Right Act and never won the right to participate in local government. After seeing candidate after candidate fall in defeat, many local people were growing apathetic about the political situation in Greenville.\textsuperscript{729} Johnson, however, had gone out on a limb and publicly dedicated her life to gaining power in local politics. To some, her loss in the January runoff was the end. She could not afford to lose any supporters, however, and made a reinvigorated appeal for people to vote. “If you want to help control your destiny and effect meaningful change,” she implored, “do not give up on your only access to government—your

\textsuperscript{725} In one guest editorial “Register and Vote,” Johnson lamented over the less than spectacular registration numbers; see, “Register and Vote,” \textit{DDT}, Aug 16, 1973, p.4.
\textsuperscript{727} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{728} Several black businesses donated refreshments for the event and Doris Williams directed the singing; see, \textit{DDT}, Aug 28, 1973, p.1.
vote.” With the Watergate scandal fresh in the minds of the public, Johnson explained that gaining political power was

the only way to change things. Remember, it is the government that controls your destiny. It makes the laws and enforces them. It decides what kind of health services you will receive. It determines what kind of education you will get, where you will go to school, where you can live, and what kind of jobs you can have. It dictates into your personal lives and will try to determine your life styles if you let it. It appoints your school boards. It receives and spends federal funds, namely, revenue sharing, without your participation. It will become corrupt as in Watergate if you let it. It chooses those who must go to war and who will die for it if necessary. It will forget you if you let it.⁷³⁰

More than nine thousand residents of Greenville had reregistered to vote in time for the municipal primary elections on the first of October (4,968 whites, 4,113 blacks and 15 Chinese Americans).⁷³¹ Anyone who was previously registered to vote but had yet not reregistered ended up being allowed to vote in October, however, and eventually the U.S. Attorney General’s office ruled that during the first year of a re-registration, anyone who has previously been registered could still vote in elections occurring during the reregistration period.⁷³² The intricacies of voter registration did not matter in the upcoming primary of the Democratic Party, which included four white candidates. Of a total of almost ten thousand voters, less than two thousand bothered to cast their vote. Johnson had received more than two thousand votes alone in January and still lost by over a thousand votes. In one editorial, Hodding Carter III “concluded that the whites voted out of racial fear rather than interest in good government [and] blacks voted in that first

election in hopes of finally having a representative of their 49 percent of the community’s population on the council.”

They got another chance in late 1973.

After councilor Sam Smith announced his retirement, Sarah Johnson was the first independent candidate to qualify for the at-large post on the city council in October 1973. On a mission, she was also better prepared to make a run at the city council the second time around. Due to the cogent organization of her support network, the campaign was flawless, playing out to near perfection. She simply relied on the organizational networks established earlier in the year and hardened during the voter registration project; “those same people were involved, and so we kept that organization intact.”

Johnson had also become somewhat of a local celebrity after her impressive run in January. She received the Elks Civil Liberties Citation in March for her “struggle against injustice,” and she was named “Woman of the Year” by the Queen City Lodge. In late October 1973, Johnson demonstrated her professional speaking abilities on the steps of the Capital in Washington D.C., where the United Methodist Church Board of Church and Society appointed her the group’s official spokesperson to read a resolution. Directed to the speaker of the House and several members of Congress, the statement called on federal authorities “to do whatever it must do to find the full truth” behind Watergate, “no matter in what files it is locked, in what tapes it is recorded or in what shadowed offices, even the highest in the land, it is hidden, and to act upon that truth, no matter how painful the process.”

While the city of Greenville promoted itself as “moving forward” into the mainstream of American life, Johnson noticed it continued to move backwards in regards to equal representation in local government. She returned from the nation’s capital and issued a

complaint about how the *DDT* published her report on the resolution as well as her picture on the steps of the Capital in Washington D.C. “The picture was not used,” she charged, “and the write-up cut.” Pic Firmin responded that the newspaper could not publish a “big story concerning her without giving like coverage to other candidates in the race.” The editor of the newspaper, however, enjoyed much more freedom in his columns. For him, the choice was clear. He intended to vote for the capable and determined African American woman, because she was a well-qualified candidate, she was a representative of almost half the city’s population, the Delta towns of Indianola, Hollandale, and Shelby had already elected African Americans to city offices, but Greenville, the “one-time leader in racial progress,” had not a single elected black official. In addition, Johnson’s presence would also provide representation for the city’s female majority, which, at the time, was represented by only one of six council members. In late November, the *DDT* publicized a fish fry and political rally for Johnson at the Serene Lodge Elks Club, which featured as keynote speaker Reverend Henry Parker, formerly her boss at the DM, who then-served as a chaplain at Berea College in Berea, Kentucky. The gathering, in addition, offered a coming together of sorts for Johnson and her former foil, Owen Brooks, who offered his staunch support.

Johnson faced two opponents in the general election. Riding a wave of popularity after winning Greenville’s “Outstanding Young Man of the Year” award, 28 year-old advertising executive Tom Cameron was the first to announce that he would seek the councilor at-large post on the city council. The executive at Lamar Outdoor Advertising described himself as a “working man with a young family whose future depends directly on the future of Greenville.”

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He believed that the city was “truly Mainstream on the move,” and he wanted “to be a part of planning the Greenville of tomorrow.” Not only was he a member of the board of directors and executive committee of Greenville Chamber of Commerce, Cameron chaired the tourist and travel committee as well as a steering committee to reorganize the Mainstream Beautification Council.  Originally from Jackson, the Mississippi State University graduate had moved to Greenville after college and met his future wife, with whom he had two young girls. In one “personal message to all Greenvillians,” Cameron embraced the city as his home. “I care about it,” he informed, and, “I decided to enter” the race to “make it a better place to live, not just for himself and his family, but also for his fellow citizens.” He concluded the “message” by disassociating himself from any special interests groups and declaring “loudly,” “I will be my own man [and] I will vote as I think it will best serve all Greenvillians.”  The popular, young business leader projected the wholesome, family-centered image that conservatives expected to see in positions of power, and he won the Democratic nomination in the October primary, which made him the favorite going into the general election.

Greenville architect Philip A. Vazzana also announced his independent candidacy for the at-large seat on the city council, of which he was an outspoken critic. Taking similar positions to those of Sarah Johnson, Vazzana pointed out a “definite need for reform” and seemed to possess the “determination to effect some fundamental changes at City Hall.” He had noticed several problems with municipal administration and wanted to focus on solutions. In his announcement,
he refused to include some items traditionally listed in political announcements, such as social affiliations and religious preference. He considered it “unimportant data” and “an insult to the voters’ intelligence.” Both Vazzana and Sarah Johnson publicized their refusal to accept “any form of campaign donation,” but only Vazzana pointed out that “one of the candidates” had spent “several thousand dollars…on this campaign.” Due to the potential of such infusions of capital to exclude qualified candidates from launching a viable campaign, he proposed placing restrictions on the amount of money candidates could spend on their campaigns. Since he believed that “no one, no matter how attractively packaged, should be elected without spelling out what he or she intends to do after they are elected,” Vazzana called for a public debate among the candidates for the at-large seat. Indeed, there would not be any free rides into office in the general election, largely because local people had invested so much emotion and hard work into finally gaining a voice in city government. The situation demanded a public debate.

Sarah Johnson readily accepted the invitation to a public debate, but Tom Cameron initially declined the request. According to the *DDT*, he was not up to speed on important local issues regarding revenue-sharing funds and needed some time to familiarize himself with local sentiments towards a proposal for a downtown civic center. In late November, the Greenville Chamber of Commerce sought to provide some indications of public sentiment by taking a poll

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744 In fact, it remained outright illegal to run for public office without affirming “the existence of a Supreme Being” in Mississippi. In 1868, the framers of the new state constitution acknowledged the values of religious belief and believed it played an important role in good government. Later, in the Preamble to the 1890 constitution and article XIV, section 265, the state declared that “no person who denies the existence of a Supreme Being shall hold any office in the state.” Even though this law was incompatible with article III, section 18, which aligned with federal law and therefore trumped article 14, section 265, the “No Religious Test Clause” of the United States Constitution, or Article VI, paragraph 3, prohibited such discrimination in politics: “The Senators and Representatives before mentioned, and the Members of the several State Legislatures, and all executive and judicial Officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be bound by Oath or Affirmation, to support this Constitution; but no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.” Clearly, section 265 contained no secular legislative purpose and only aided religion over non-religion; see, John W. Winkle, *The Mississippi State Constitution: A Reference Guide* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 143.

at its annual dinner meeting. The gathering of an estimated six hundred upper-class local elites and their guests voted overwhelmingly to support the civic center project, which proved enough to confirm the position of Cameron, who later commented: “I feel that the chamber of commerce survey...reaffirms my own personal survey of people in all areas of this town that there is a great interest in the possibility of Greenville having its own civic center.”

The results of the poll came under sharp attack from both independent candidates for councilman-at-large. Sarah Johnson was “outraged” at the poll and denounced it as “very misleading,” because it only surveyed societal elites, chamber members, and their out of town guests; not more than twenty blacks were included in the poll, she charged, and they were only “those who could afford” to pay $12.50 a plate. She likened the poll to a new form of tax on political participation, “a new way to charge citizens for their participation in polls concerning major expenditures that will affect the whole community.” Philip Vazzana lampooned the chamber poll as “nothing more than an attempt…to influence the promotion of a questioned civic center project.” Rather than representing the opinions of the chamber of commerce membership, he insisted, “it only represents a vote by several hundred-people attending a banquet.” In fact, he harbored serious doubts about the high level of local support, saying he felt like “it may not be in the cards this time.” To better gauge local opinion, he proposed the chamber endorse a referendum to determine sentiment for and against the proposed civic center. The “revenue money (which is proposed to finance the center),” he declared, “belongs to the people and they should be offered a chance to determine” if it should be used to, in essence, build a monument to the present administration.

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747 Ibid.
748 Ibid.
749 Ibid.
wanted the auditorium for conventions, Johnson added, “let them build it—free enterprise at its best.”  

On the heels of the chamber poll results, Cameron agreed to debate the two independent candidates the first week in December. A published transcription of the debate reveals that most discussion centered on the proposed civic center, but Sarah Johnson also took the time to brand Vazzana and Cameron as unable to represent half of the city’s population. “Both of my opponents are white and neither is poor,” she charged, and “they both have money or important people with big money…backing them.” Johnson considered the city council—in its present form—more of a “social club,” which remained accountable to the affluent and indifferent to the needs of the poor. Since she believed that simply installing another “important public figure,” whose conflicting interests were often sympathetic with the concerns of more powerful constituents, was antithetical to the fundamental tenets of democracy, Johnson maintained that the only way Cameron or Vazzana could represent local people in the city was to “turn black or get poor.”

“If Indianola, the birthplace of the Citizens Council, recognizes the need for change,” the need to elect a black alderman, she asked, “why can’t” a city with the liberal reputation of Greenville?

The proposed use of revenue-sharing funds for a civic center received much criticism from everyone except Tom Cameron. He maintained there was a definite “need for a civic center,” because it would have a similar positive impact on the local economy to “building a mall.” Citing the availability of federal monies for social service and maintenance needs, he concluded that it was an opportune time for such a large project. Sarah Johnson disagreed

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outright with Cameron, and she decried a recent chamber of commerce statement, which stated that most folks in the city ranked the civic center as a top priority. According to polls conducted at two radio stations, she mentioned, only twenty percent of people cited the need for a civic center, which, in fact, ranked well behind more pressing needs for low income housing, jobs, better healthcare services, street paving, social services, better drainage and upgrades to the fire department. Following heavy rains, standing water was often so “deep enough to drown a small child.” In light of such hazardous conditions, Johnson considered the decision to fund a civic center “unthinkable” and pledged to establish meaningful priorities for the revenue sharing funds. The “lack of drainage,” of course, would “place very high on the list.” She had come to the conclusion that the city should “spend the public's money on programs for people, not on piles of stone.”

Sarah Johnson, in fact, citing the recent success of the Mainstream Festival, advised against using revenue sharing funds to build a civic center, at least until the city had enough time to test existing sites and facilities. The chamber had “used the levee and the Downtown Shopping Park to great advantage” in staging the Mainstream Festival, she argued in a statement issued from her office, which pulled people into Greenville “from miles around, even though none of the entertainment had local identification.” By using existing assets and the same community resources, Johnson proposed celebrating instead a style of music that had been conceived and nurtured in the Delta. Insisting it would not only attract more people from around the country, but also impel music enthusiasts around the globe to travel many miles and pay exorbitant prices to hear the Delta blues performed by “musicians who live among us, many unknown to their neighbors,” such as Sam Chatmon, Little Milton, Little Bill Williams, T-Model

Ford and Frank Frost, she was indeed the first to promote the concept of a “Delta Blues Festival.” Such an event would boost tax revenues and grow the local economy “and at the same time use a part of our heritage that we have too long taken for granted.” The city had indeed proved it could stage a successful concert, book popular entertainers and accommodate over well over ten thousand people without a civic center.

On Election Day, even Tom Cameron had to admit that Johnson “did a hell of a job getting folks out to vote.” She stationed poll watchers at each polling place with lists of her supporters in hand, and Cameron complained that their dubious behavior might have directly influenced people to vote. The election committee later certified the victory of Sarah Johnson, the city’s first black city council member since Reconstruction. The 35-year old mother of four received a total of 2,440 out of 5,064 votes, while Cameron got 1,980 and Vazzana only 537. Concerning his prior complaint, Cameron decided not to pursue the matter in court, and he affirmed his complete confidence in the “competence of the election committee workers,” saying, “I feel there is no discrepancy in any way with the results from any of the polling places.” Exhilarated and proud to serve on the city council, Johnson delivered an acceptance speech that captured the magnitude of the victory, yet warned against a lull in activity:

Words cannot express how deeply grateful I am for all of the support which I received. This election has brought about unity in the community, more self-determination, and now victory. But we cannot become satisfied with winning this. We must move ahead tonight and run another candidate the next time. We have seen in my campaign the coalition of the poor, rich, black and white. This is

755 She also errantly listed the name of “Mississippi” John Hurt, who had passed in the mid-1960s; see, “The Mid-Delta: Mrs. Johnson Comments on Funds,” *Delta Democrat-Times*, Dec 5, 1973, p.2.
indicative of the fact that masses in Greenville want a change in city hall. This is a new day in Greenville, and it offers new hope for unity and progress.\textsuperscript{760}

Johnson made a request to hold the inauguration ceremony on the front steps of city hall. Not only did she want to allow for a large crowd to attend the event, but she also wanted the outside service to “symbolize an open administration on her part.” On January 7, 1974, county chancellor Ernest Kellner swore in the city’s first black city counselor in recent times, as well as two white incumbents, in front of a crowd of perhaps four hundred people.\textsuperscript{761} Johnson handed in her resignation as director of Head Start programs in Washington County “to devote full time to her duties” on the city council. Offering a yearly salary of only $2,400, she expected her family of four children “to do some sacrificing” at home. Similar to other African Americans who had a calling to lead in the black freedom struggle, Johnson and her family made personal sacrifices and carried the burden of her victory.

The Atlanta-based Voter Education Project (VEP) released its semi-annual report on the progress of black political involvement in February 1974. According to \textit{DDT} editor Hodding Carter III, it “made for quietly heartening reading to anyone interested in enduring equality.” In 1973, African Americans had won elections for 363 local offices and two legislative posts in the South. Eighty-four black municipal candidates in Mississippi won their elections, including Sarah Johnson. Seven blacks were elected mayor, three won seats on school boards, and fifty-one were elected to city council, aldermanic, or commission positions. The victories, Carter argued, offered clear evidence that the South was not “moving backward” and African Americans were “moving forward” in Greenville.\textsuperscript{762} The victory of Johnson was particularly

\textsuperscript{760} “Sworn In,” \textit{DDT}, Jan 7, 1974, p.1.
\textsuperscript{761} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{762} “Solid Progress,” \textit{DDT}, Feb 19, 1974, p.4.
fortuitous, due to the continuance of the discriminatory at-large voting system. Had the third candidate, Phil Vazzana, not entered the race, the 537 votes he received might have gone to Cameron, giving him the victory with 2,517 votes. Though some liberal whites had certainly decided it was time to give their political support to qualified black candidates, the ability of Johnson to bring together the fractious black social and political organizations in the city was perhaps the most essential element required to win the election.

Sarah Johnson wasted little time in making her presence felt on the city council. *Soul Force*, the mimeographed organ of a black community action organization in Oxford, reported proudly of her “Historic Inauguration” as well as a subsequent controversy that arose about the relocation of the Food Stamp Office. She made a motion and cast the deciding vote to approve its relocation to the Tatum Building in downtown Greenville.\(^{763}\) The first black woman to serve on the city council also unknowingly benefitted from the “oil price shock” of 1973, which, along with the stock market crash that resulted from a collapsing monetary system and crushing levels of inflation, proved the first discrete event to have a persistent effect on the global economy since the Great Depression.\(^{764}\) Economists started noticing evidence of the recession in the summer of 1974, which precipitated a shift in public priorities regarding revenue-sharing funds. A feasibility study for the civic center had not accounted for any future economic downturns, and its potential profitability melted away rather quickly in late summer and fall. By pushing for a referendum on the subject, Johnson achieved her goal of killing the civic center project and putting the needs of local people as the top priority for revenue-sharing funds.


As early as February, Johnson started to push the council to set their priorities. According to Hodding Carter, the council seemed “suspiciously close to putting most if not all, of its revenue sharing funds into the civic center basket.” Concerned over the efficacy of such a debatable proposition, he hoped the matter was at least discussed publicly before the city made any irrevocable commitments. Johnson had mentioned at least two immediate needs for the money, which would total in the millions after the general five-year course of revenue sharing allotments. In place of bonds, for example, the city could allocate some funds for an extensive street repair and renovation program, and the city’s firemen could start receiving the same pay as city policemen.\(^{765}\)

The city council, however, did not set a meeting to discuss priorities for revenue-sharing funds until the end of the summer. The money, which by that time added up to over two million dollars, was still sitting in the bank—invested at rates well below the rate of inflation—and the city continued to sell bonds to finance its road construction projects. While dubious chamber polls and faux referendums held at the height of the Mainstream Festival made for good propaganda in support of the civic center, they did not provide an accurate reflection of all citizen’s views in Greenville. The “all but inescapable conclusion,” according to Hodding Carter, was that a majority of the city council had secretly decided to allocate the bulk of the funds to build a civic center; thus, they initiated polling in specific settings to make it seem as if they were responding to overwhelming public demand.\(^{766}\)

The newest member of the city council had no intention of allowing the city council to spend all of its revenue-sharing funds on a civic center. In early July, Sarah Johnson sponsored a revenue sharing workshop to educate the public about what projects they could, and could not,


262
address with the monies. Considering the extensive and widespread public ignorance on the subject, as well as the different interpretations of federal guidelines forwarded by different state and local officials, the liberal editor of the *DDT* considered the workshops a sensible solution that “ought to be repeated, under full council auspices, several times between now” and the day of the “priority-setting” meeting of the city council. A diverse crowd of sixty citizens came to the revenue sharing workshop at the Mississippi Power & Light Company auditorium, which included a question and answer session with Greenville City Clerk Lloyd Lancaster and a lecture on “Revenue Sharing and the Law” from attorney Charles McTeer, director of the Mississippi Public Information Alliance (MPIA).767 Sarah Johnson also announced her plans to ask the city council to establish a special citizen advisory committee to study plans for the best usage of the revenue-sharing funds. Hodding Carter III urged the city council to “listen carefully to the people unrepresented by the chamber,” or any other organization, before making such a totalizing financial decision. The editor also suggested holding a series of workshops around the city the “best way” to accomplish that goal. Even with “obvious municipal needs going begging,” he maintained, “the council is elected to make decisions, not pass the buck, so there is no need for a civic center referendum.”768

With a council majority purportedly in support of funding the civic center, Sarah Johnson recognized that a referendum on the civic center was perhaps the only way to block its

767 More citizen participation in the decisions for spending revenue-sharing funds was the focal point of the revenue-sharing workshop. McTeer explained the do's and don'ts of revenue-sharing and urged that more citizens participate in making decisions for spending of the revenue-sharing funds. “The one great inherent defect” in the revenue-sharing act, McTeer lamented, was that it made no specific provision for citizen participation in decision-making. From its conceptual beginnings under the Kennedy and Johnson administrations until its enactment in 1972, the concept of revenue-sharing was in essence a method of dispersing federal tax revenue to state and local governments. Out of a total $30.2 billion in tax revenues, state governments received one-third of the funds, while county and local governments got two-thirds. Some federal grants dealing with social services have been reduced since the enactment of revenue-sharing; see, “McTeer to Speak at Workshop,” *DDT*, July 10, 1974, p.2.
construction. She believed that the funds needed to address the “human needs” of the city before building a civic center.\textsuperscript{769} Taking a page from the playbook of Phil Vazzana, she pushed for the referendum to establish the public’s priorities for the revenue-sharing money. In her mind, only twenty percent of people legitimately prioritized the civic center over the more pressing needs for jobs, healthcare services, low income housing, street paving, better drainage and establishing a professional fire department. When the city council proposed a twenty percent increase in water and sewer rates to offset the costs of a water treatment plant, Sarah Johnson brought together her diverse network of local progressives once again under the auspices of the Greenville Public Information Alliance (GPIA), a branch of the MPIA. Former council candidate and contractor Ezzie R. Smith and DM director Owen Brooks worked alongside liberal white Democrats such as Mike Ward, who had decided to finish his fellowship at MACE and quickly immersed himself in local politics. As the vice president of the GPIA, Ward wanted to help “get more people involved in the decision-making process.” The alliance printed up sheets listing all of the proposed programs, and the group circulated it so that residents could prioritize them and “express how they think the funds should be used.”\textsuperscript{770} Former council candidate Ezzie Smith and other members of the GPIA worked the phones and called people to solicit their support and explain the proposals.

Though the city council planned to set revenue-sharing priorities in early August, they had to postpone such decisions after councilor Robert May got a motion passed calling for a referendum to find out once-and-for-all whether or not revenue-sharing funds should be used for a civic center. May had little doubt in his mind that the civic center was of the utmost priority,

but he wanted to have a “mandate from the people” before moving forward. He would have liked to have proven that most folks in the city did indeed want it, but if not, they had to decide on proper appropriations. “If the referendum passes, then the council can consider the center as its No. 1 priority,” he concluded, “But if it is defeated, then we can turn to the work of setting the other priorities.”

Ever focused on increasing the participation of local citizens, Sarah Johnson encouraged everyone to vote in the referendum and help the city council decide how best to use revenue-sharing funds.

The only revenue-sharing money spent to date by the city was the cost of a 1972 feasibility study on the civic center and more than $92,774 to help meet a street improvement bond. The remaining $1.8 million was sitting in a trust fund. Several people voiced objections to the center being built downtown, as suggested in a feasibility study. Carl Hagwood hated the study, for it only accepted and compared two proposals, both of which, he believed, were poor options. GPIA vice president Mike Ward also attacked the feasibility study for the civic center, pointing out that it based its conclusions on questionable assumptions, specifically that the country would not suffer any economic decline in the future. Economists had already noticed the onset of a “recession,” however, and the potential profitability of the civic center melted away in the slumping mid-1970s economy.

On October 1, 1974, over 2,000 voters in Greenville rejected a proposal to use revenue sharing funds to build a civic center (2,119 to 1,283). The referendum also made all of the revenue sharing funds available for a host of road and runway repair projects, library improvement projects, day care training programs, sewage treatment plant improvement projects, and other priorities.

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772 Mike Ward experienced only failure as a political candidate in Washington County, but he made his presence felt on the organizing level. In September 1975, Ward lost an election for Justice of the Peace in Beat 3 to Wilma Lunceford—1,585 votes to 660; see, “County Election Holds No Surprises,” *DDT*, Nov 5, 1975, p.1.
street assessment and improved drainage programs. Due to the persistence of Sarah Johnson and her allies at the Greenville Public Information Alliance, the city council abandoned all future plans for the construction of a civic center in downtown Greenville and set the priorities for the revenue-sharing money, making them more agreeable to the majority of the people.

The minority influence of Sarah Johnson proved salient in the fight to keep the civic center out of the city, but she remained the lone voice on the council for the poor and local blacks throughout the seventies and eighties. Her paltry salary from the city all but mandated that she retain employment elsewhere. After attending a meeting of the Greenville Press Council, she learned that she could get a job immediately at the oldest radio station in the city, WJPR. Having attended the Elkins Institute in Memphis, taken the three Federal Communications Commission (FCC) examinations, and received her first-class radio operator’s license in 1974, Johnson was the first-licensed radio operator to work at the station. In 1975, she worked as a research survey analyst for MACE, which had received $50,000 to conduct a feasibility study on the establishment of a health maintenance organization in Washington County. She also worked with the Delta Foundation in its late-1970s youth employment programs.

Speaking in front of the tennis courts at Maude Bryan Park in her 1977 re-election campaign, Johnson reminded the crowd that “the defeat of the $5 million civic center [was] a major accomplishment.” It was largely through the efforts of Johnson that local citizens realized that the civic center would be a waste of money. The revenue-sharing money funded the pouring of new sidewalks at Tulwiler School, the covering of ditches on Hughes Street and Frisby Park, the construction of tennis courts at Rounds and Maude Bryan Parks, the renovation of the public

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swimming pools. Indeed, the “persistence” of the incumbent city councilor secured the city council a small pay raise as well as re-election in 1977.\footnote{Kim Eisler, “Sarah Johnson Begins Campaign,” DDT, Oct 23, 1977, p.10.}

No other black candidates, however, built off of her success in municipal politics, mainly due to the maintenance of the discriminatory at-large voting system. Utilized in large cities more frequently than in small towns, the commission form of government inhibited the election of blacks to municipal office. Even when black voters composed forty percent or more of the local populace, at-large elections usually resulted in the victories of white candidates. The court challenges of African Americans forced many cities and counties to later choose their commissioners through the use of district rather than county or citywide elections, which greatly increased the prospects of victory for African American candidates, especially in majority black areas.\footnote{Sharon D. Wright Austin, Transformation of Plantation Politics: Black Politics, Concentrated Poverty, and Social Capital in the Mississippi Delta (Ithaca, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006), 106.} While the forced implementation of ward elections in smaller towns resulted in the successful election of a host of black candidates for city council, going from 61 in 1974 to 143 in 1979, it was the largest cities in Mississippi that offered the most ardent resistance to the elimination of the at-large voting system. Greenville, as well as Greenwood, Jackson and Hattiesburg, fought to retain at-large elections until the mid-1980s, when the amendment of section two of the Voting Rights Act outlawed such discriminatory electoral systems.\footnote{Chandler Davidson and Bernard Grofman, Quiet Revolution in the South: The Impact of the Voting Rights Act, 1965-1990 (Princeton University Press, 1994), 146.} Sarah Johnson continued to serve on the city council until the mid-1990s, when she took over the role of vice-mayor.
MUSIC FESTIVALS AT THE FAIRGROUNDS:  
THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE WASHINGTON COUNTY EXPOSITION CENTER

In light of growing opposition to the location of the civic center in downtown Greenville, the Washington County Board of Supervisors decided to expand the open-air show building at the fairgrounds. The initial plan was to refurbish the open-air arena at the fairgrounds to serve in much the same capacity as the Bolivar County Exposition Building, which hosted a variety of large gatherings such as equipment and farm demonstrations, boxing matches, rodeos, and large-scale concerts with popular entertainers. Lucina Brooks, the recent widow of DM director Owen Brooks, remembered going to the expo building in Cleveland to watch performances by rhythm and blues pianist Ray Charles and country music singer Charley Pride. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, she argued, it was the only venue in the Delta that featured more popular, nationally-known artists, largely because its ability to accommodate very large crowds of people and more popular, contemporary musicians, such as Conway Twitty. In late 1973, the board of supervisors in Washington County appropriated $35,000 out of its most recent bundle of revenue-sharing funds to complete the first phase of plans to convert the arena at the fairgrounds into an “expo center.” The county provided another $125,000 in March 1974 to further convert the open-air arena into a semi-enclosed exposition center, fully capable of hosting a range of special events, such as horse shows, conventions, music concerts, and other large entertainment spectacles. The new venue officially became known as the Washington County Exposition Center (WCEC), and it allowed promoters to bring in more popular artists and attract

778 The Cleveland American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars promoted the Conway Twitty Show, which, of course, featured Conway Twitty, the Twitty Birds, Ace Cannon, Anthony Armstrong Jones and the Memphis Brotherhood; see, “Twitty in Cleveland Tonight,” DDT, May 7, 1971, p.1.  
larger crowds to Washington County in the mid-1970s.\footnote{Owen Brooks and Lucina Brooks, interview by T. DeWayne Moore, May 23, 2013, Jackson, Mississippi.} Having already enlarged the duties and size of the fledgling fairgrounds committee a few years earlier, the board of supervisors officially renamed it the Washington County Park Commission (WCPC) and charged it with the duties of maintaining and managing the expanded recreational facility.\footnote{“Panel Expansion Sought,” \emph{DDT}, June 2, 1970, p.12.}

The expo building lacked certain amenities and remained ill-suited, however, for hosting events at night and during times of extreme weather. The existing lighting system in the WCEC, for example, was in “poor” condition, according to one park commissioner, who believed that the installation of “clearer” light bulbs would solve the problem.\footnote{“Fees Are Planned: Expo Building,” \emph{DDT}, Feb 13, 1975, p.8.} Several members of the park commission, in fact, hoped to obtain revenue sharing funds in 1975 and further expand the services in the expo building to reflect the accommodations of a civic center.\footnote{The city did not take immediate action on his request; see, \emph{DDT}, Nov 24, 1974, p.1; \emph{DDT}, Nov 15, 1974, p.10.} Having recently funded its significant expansion, however, local officials decided not to further enhance the venue for several years. The issues with the lights did not have a major effect on the staging of concerts, however, because most professional and touring artists carried their own sound equipment and light shows. Other than the Mainstream Festival, not one major festival or mass meeting had “ever been done in Greenville,” as local businessman and music enthusiast Stanley Sherman pointed out, because there was “no facility for it.”\footnote{Sherman applied for a permit to sell alcohol in April 1971 at a club called One Block East; see, \emph{DDT}, Apr 7, 1971, p.20.} Since no venues large enough had existed to hold the amount of people required to profit off the concert, promoters could not book popular (read: expensive) music artists to perform in the city. The expo building, most importantly, lacked a central heating and air conditioning system, which dissuaded its usage during the winter and the sweltering summer heat of the Delta. Though the building featured
several large fans, which helped circulate the air inside and improved ventilation, they proved all but useless after the month of June. The renovated WCEC made its debut with the first annual walking horse show of the Kiwanis Club on May 31, 1975. “The show was a complete success,” according to one club spokesperson, which attracted not only a capacity crowd of over two thousand people, but also the interest of local promoters in the expo building. Due to the heat of summer in the Delta, however, they had to “wait until the fall” to schedule concerts at the facility.

Businessman Stanley Sherman, co-owner of an affluent local club called One Block East, supporter of local music, and traveler of the world in his spare time, had been “actively investigating” the possibilities of bringing rock, soul, and country music artists to perform in Greenville for a long time. Along with the financial support of local car dealership proprietor Mike Hinkle, he established Hot Delta, Inc. to promote concerts at the recently upgraded expo building. Sherman billed his first major promotional effort as “the first real rock concert in Greenville’s history,” a title likely aimed at the young organizers of the 1970 Delta Festival, particularly Mike Ward, whose ex-wife then lived with Sherman. “This is the first attempt ever,” he further asserted, “to bring some quality rock music with name bands into the Greenville area.” The concert featured the “hard-rocking” music of Larry Raspberry and the Highsteppers, as well as Greenville native and former WDDT disc jockey Sid Selvidge. Even though the promotion of

788 Sherman opened One Block East with Kenneth Levy and Jessie Brent in July 1972. Before their partnership, the building had been an office for Bell South and a bank. Sherman said he and his partners argued over what to name the business, and One Block East was a name they could agree on because of its location one block east of the levee. “We wanted a nice place,” he said. “There were only honky-tonk places to go to, and you had to watch your back.” The partners fixed the building up with good carpet, art on the walls, and gold faucets in the bathrooms. “It was selfish of us,” Sherman admitted, but “we wanted someplace nice to go” that was safe; see, Megan Wright, “Remnants of Iconic Nightclub Demolished,” Mississippi Business Journal, Jan 13, 2012; http://msbusiness.com/2012/01/remnants-of-iconic-nightclub-demolished/ [accessed May 13, 2015].
rock concerts was indeed a tenuous business in Greenville, Sherman proved willing to gamble. “If they don’t like it, they’ll tell us that at the box office,” he admitted, but “if the people want it they’re going to let us know at the box office too, and we’ll do more of it.”

The WCPC did not object to the concept of rock concerts outright, but it also reserved the right to prohibit rentals for certain events, such as a proposal earlier in the spring for an “all day-all night battle of the bands.” Though the commission “quietly turned down” that application, citing that noise from the extended performances would intrude upon neighboring residential communities, it approved the application of Sherman, who promised to limit the event to four hours and make sure it was “handled properly.” The superintendent of the fairgrounds, who had rented the building to other promoters at the standard fee of one hundred dollars, expected no trouble and the county sheriff anticipated the only problem being a high traffic volume. In the sheriff’s opinion, the previous two or three concerts were not too successful. The venue had yet to host “a big crowd out there for a concert.” Nevertheless, he eased the minds of the local anti-rock crowd and told one reporter that regardless he planned to “keep a close eye” on the concert. To further appease concerned citizens, Sherman hired ten security guards to “keep the event orderly,” and he did not allow alcoholic beverages in the building.

The continuing influence of the anti-rock contingent on local citizens and police as well as the promoter’s efforts to instill “confidence in the community” hurt attendance and increased the costs of the concert. To cover all expenses and walk away with a small profit, Sherman needed to attract upwards of two thousand people to the rock concert. The bleachers inside the expo building seated about 2,500 people, and the seating along the infield was “festival style,”

790 Ibid.
791 Ibid.
allowing for the comfortable admittance of several thousand more. On the day before the event, he claimed that pre-sales were “coming along very well,” but his reliance on revenue from concessions and ticket sales proved a poor financial decision. In the anti-rock atmosphere of the Delta, some folks equated the rock festival with an “orgy of marijuana and alcohol,” but one local reporter asserted that “there were no drugs anywhere in the building.” The all-white crowd of three to five hundred well-behaved, young rock music fans was much too small for the promoters to come out ahead financially. Sherman attributed the lack of attendance and the scarcity of drugs to the widespread rumor that plainclothes officers were roaming around the audience, hoping to make arrests. The sheriff later admitted the crowd was peaceful; his officers made no arrests. “Everybody had their clothes on,” Sherman chortled, “no drunks, no dope.” It was clear to him that “this crowd didn’t have sin on its mind.”

The audience also evinced a lack of enthusiasm for the softer, acoustic music of Sid Selvidge, who one contemporary writer for the NYT considered one of the “finest and most diverse exponents of traditional Southeastern American music.” Not merely a first-rate guitar player, Selvidge also possessed a “simply remarkable” voice, which he occasionally relied on “too much,” sometimes “at the expense of simple, moving musical statements.” His repertoire revolved around his original music, but he drew from a deep well of cultural traditions and performed “hillbilly” tunes and “cowboy laments” equally as proficiently as blues and rock ‘n roll. It was clear after a while that his quiet acoustic numbers not going over well among the young audience. Having grown more and more restless over the course of an hour-and-a-half long performance, when he announced his last song, the crowd let loose a thunderous applause. The restive audience turned into “dancing, clapping throngs” and rushed the stage as the lights

793 John Rockwell, “Sid Selvidge is Uncommonly Gifted Singer-Guitarist,” NYT, Feb 14, 1977, p.27.
went down in preparation for the well-honed musical performance of Larry Raspberry & the High Steppers. The frontman for the most popular band in Memphis at the time was a true dynamo on stage, as expert record collector and music critic Cub Koda put it, “going back and forth between funky lead guitar and Jerry Lee Lewis-style piano pounding, all the while working the crowd like an evangelist full of spiritualistic fervor, his on-stage patter heavily influenced by his childhood hero, Memphis disc jockey Dewey Phillips.”  Raspberry remained true to his reputation that night in Greenville. By “screaming chatter at the crowd and doing everything with his guitar but making love to it,” the dynamic musician did not disappoint the small, yet enthusiastic crowd. He even played the keyboard and danced on top of a piano. Not too many folks got to see his enthusiastic performance, however, and the promoters “almost certainly lost money” due to the stigmatization of the “rock festival” in the Delta.

The expo building, nevertheless, proved the most viable option for aspiring local promoters, who hoped to attract thousands of people and make a profit. In early June, Leland native and loyalist black Democrat Rudolph Pennington as well as veteran white promoter Jerry Murray, both of whom founded Jerry-O Productions, rented the expo building to stage one of B.B. King’s five blues concerts following the Medgar Evers Memorial Festival. Pennington promoted the June 18th concert as a “real homecoming” for King, since it was allegedly the first time in a decade he had performed in the Delta. In addition to King and his orchestra, the promoters also scheduled a couple of local artists to perform at the event. Though local singer Shirley Phillips dropped out, the integrated nine-piece soul band, The Mod Magicians, delivered

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796 Jerry Murray was raised by his grandmother Mary L. Brown, who owned and operated the North End Café in Arcola from the mid-1940s until her death in 1972; see, “Obituary: Mary L. Brown,” DDT, Sep 27, 1972, p.16.
797 In addition to Greenville, the concert series also included concerts in Meridian, Hattiesburg, Jackson, and Fayette. “Greenville Concert: B.B. King to Perform,” DDT, June 11, 1976, p.10.
“crisp renditions” of popular disco and soul songs, which received a “healthy round of applause” from an early estimated crowd of five hundred people—“made up mostly of under-30 whites and over-30 blacks”—who showed up early, paid their five dollars at the door, and welcomed the blues singer back home.

Once the native blues guitarist hit stage, the warmed up crowd walked forward and started to dance in front of the stage. Though security attempted to calm the raucous dancing of folks in the front, the audience had grown to almost a thousand people, many of whom remained on their “feet during the performance.” The “freely flowing” nature of alcoholic beverages contributed to the “cheerful feelings” of the crowd in the rain-cooled Delta air. Even though one woman, who imbibed a bit much perhaps, climbed up on the stage, and had to be removed from the building, the rest of the concert went off without incident. The majority of complaints concerned all the moisture, mosquitos and mud, which proved constant irritations during the concert.  

Given the overcast skies and periodic rainfall, Pennington was “very happy” with a turnout of almost a thousand people. Had thundershowers not broke out several times during the night, he declared, “we could have had even more” people come out to the muddy fairgrounds. Unlike the stigmatized and racially-imbalanced-attendance of whites at the rock concert, the blues concert of B.B. King proved attractive to segments of both the white and black communities and suggested the significant economic potential of future blues concerts and attractions. Having already started negotiating with blues artist Albert King, Pennington promised to bring popular blues musicians back to the Delta as soon as possible. His follow-up

798 “B.B. King Sparks Dancing in Expo Building,” *DDT*, June 20, 1976, p.3.
concert had to “wait until the fall,” however, as the elevated “temperature would be a problem at the expo building” over the summer.  

As the city geared up for its controversial bicentennial Mainstream Festival and Donald Sutton, of the Delta Ministry, attempted to organize a countervailing “black folk festival” at Strange Park, WDDT disc jockey and amateur concert promoter Clyde Pinkney organized the Spirit of ‘76 Homecoming Soul Festival at the expo building on July 3, 1976. Since it was his first experience at organizing a package of entertainers as opposed to only one artist, Pinckney contacted Guy Productions out of Chicago, which provided him with a package of soul artists, including a popular group called The Chi-Lites, the vibrant and pleading soul music of Delta-native Garland Green, Jean Davis (sister of the soulful Tyrone Davis) and the Facts of Life Band, and Syl Johnson, who got his start in Mississippi and recorded the major R&B hit “Is It Because I’m Black” in 1969. Pinkney also invited several guest musicians with roots in Greenville, including Temptations musical director Benjamin Wright and soul musician General Columbus Crook III, an initial member of the group Earth, Wind, and Fire who had enjoyed some moderate success as solo artist. By charging five dollars at the door, Pinckney hoped to attract a large enough group of people, some of whom returned for their class reunion at the formerly all-black Coleman High School, to recoup his investment, and perhaps even organize “bigger” concerts in the future. The headlining act, The Chi-Lites, did not show up as advertised, however, due to

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799 “B.B. King Sparks Dancing in Expo Building,” *DDT*, June 20, 1976, p.3.
801 General Columbus Crook III was the grandson of a World War I veteran and grew up in the middle class home of a collector for the prosperous Century Funeral Home. He attended Coleman High School from 1959 to 1963, and he sang in the school’s award-winning choir, which beat out sixteen other black high school choirs at the Mississippi Song Festival in Jackson several times; see, “Coleman Choir Wins Again,” *DDT*, Mar 20, 1960, p.11; “General Columbus Crook Jr.,” *U.S., World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2005.
their “complete breakdown” after pleading guilty to tax evasion charges earlier that year.\textsuperscript{803} The consumer protection division of the state attorney general’s office, which sought to redress dubious practices such as false advertising, offered to help people who purchased tickets to the festival get refunds on account of their absence from the bill.\textsuperscript{804} Even though Sutton and the DM abandoned the folk festival and Pinkney lost money in the end, the Homecoming Soul Festival offered blacks folks in Washington County an appealing alternative to the white-oriented Mainstream Festival, demonstrating the potential incentives of promoting similar events at the expo building.

Perry Payton, a local undertaker and proprietor of a blues bar called the Flowing Fountain, who had been booking soul and blues bands in the city for a while, invited Leland native and popular soul singer Tyrone Davis to come “home to the Delta” and perform at the expo building on September 11, 1976.\textsuperscript{805} Even though Payton believed it would be the last show of the season due to the facility’s lack of central heating, Rudolph Pennington and Jerry Murray of Jerry-O Productions brought B.B. King back to the mid-Delta by “popular demand” on

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\textsuperscript{805} Born on May 4, 1938 in Greenville, Tyrone (Davis) Fetson grew up in the small hamlet of Wilmot, just south of Leland. He realized at age fourteen that his future looked bleak in Washington County, and he went to live with his minister father in Saginaw, Michigan. In 1959, Davis moved to Chicago and worked as a valet driver for blues guitarist Freddie King. Developing a friendship with soul blues singer Otis Clay and learning from early mentors such as Bobby “Blue” Bland and Little Milton, David eventually set out on his own career solo career. After gaining valuable experience singing in the blues clubs that dotted Chicago’s West Side, popular recording artist and piano player Harold Burrage discovered the young performer and took him under his wing. Due to the guidance and local influence of Burrage, Davis received his first recording contract with the local Four Brothers label, which released his first single, “Suffer,” under the name “Tyrone the Wonder Boy.” Though his early recordings sold poorly, he caught a break in 1969, when one disc jockey in Texas decided to broadcast one of his B-sides titled “Can I Change My Mind?” The song catapulted the one-time valet driver from obscurity to the ranks of the Billboard R&B charts. Once it crossed over to the pop charts, the song was well on its way to selling over one million copies, securing his position in the limelight. Before heading out to California to perform on the Dick Clark Show the following summer, Davis returned to Leland and performed at a packed Mixon Garret VFW Post with his sister, Barbara Davis, and the 20th Century Mind Changers Band.\textsuperscript{805} His spring 1970 release of “Turn Back the Hands of Time,” according to one journalist, proved another platinum seller as well as his most enduring anthem; see, “Blues Star Comes Home,” \textit{DDT}, June 23, 1970, p.12; “Leland or Chicago?,” \textit{DDT}, July 29, 1970, p.4; “Davis Concert Saturday Night,” \textit{DDT}, Sep 10, 1976, p.10; advertisement, \textit{DDT}, Sep 10, 1976, p.14.
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November 20 to headline the “International Blues Festival” at the WCEC. Boasting a lineup of several “top blues singers,” such as Bobby “Blue” Bland, Little Milton, O.V. Wright, Albert King, Little Johnny Taylor, John Lee Hooker and Otis Clay, Murray proclaimed, “A show of this size will be the first for Greenville.” The last blues concert in June attracted almost a thousand people, mostly young whites and older blacks, to see B.B. King and the Mod Magicians. By bringing in a group of popular blues musicians and entertainers, Murray hoped to attract a capacity crowd to the expo building that included not only young whites and older blacks, but also the younger, more militant black youths. The Delta blues was, after all, an important “part of their heritage,” and the blues artists on the bill.

As Albert King steered his gold and white Lincoln down Airport Road towards the expo building, as many as five thousand people tromped down the side of the road, through all the mud, and filled the barn-like structure to near capacity. DDT staff writer Linda Williams reported that the crowd was made up of “blacks over thirty in their finest attire and whites under thirty in blue jeans,” but the sheer size of the audience makes her bifurcated generalization problematic. Considering that one promotional mission was to foster a broad appreciation of black cultural traditions, her demographic description of the crowd suggests the absence of young blacks. Though several large, “disco-oriented bands” opened the show, the unusually large crowd had “clearly” come for the strong lineup of soul and blues artists. The majority of concertgoers, specifically those who had braved the torrential downpour and sloshed through muddy fields to get inside the WCEC and hear this lineup of popular blues artists at the International Blues Festival, stayed packed inside the expo building all night, making sure to

807 Tickets were five dollars in advance and six dollars at the door, and they were on sale at the Music Scene in Greenville Mall, D.S. Greer Texaco at Highway 1, and Alexander and Modern Cleaners; see, “B.B. King to Return Saturday,” DDT, Nov 17, 1976, p.16.
hear each performance of disco/rock music, Delta blues, and southern soul-blues. At the clock approached and passed two o’clock in the morning, Albert King bent and pulled off the last notes of “I’ll Play the Blues for You,” thanked the enthusiastic crowd, and calmly made his way offstage. B.B. King and his band delivered the final performance of the evening. Thousands of “feet stomped the dirt floor” as B.B. King belted out standards such as “The Thrill is Gone” and howled out the hits from his first gold record, *Together for the First Time.* 808 While only a couple of local articles covered the International Blues Festival at the WCEC, sources suggested that the capacity crowd had a wonderful, if a bit cold and muddy, experience and certainly got their six dollars’ worth of the blues. Reaching new heights in attendance at the WCEC, the promoters discovered that the building’s lack of central heating and susceptibility to heavy rains were not enough to dissuade people from turning out in droves for such a popular slate of blues artists. Almost as soon as the WCEC developed into a profitable venue, however, the city council and the county board of supervisors decided to take advantage of federal grants funds and erect a new expo building at the fairgrounds. Though the original design focused on optimizing the building to accommodate massive crowds and top-shelf entertainment, the plantation elite in the county hijacked the project and imposed more agricultural building designs.

808 King started out playing spirituals and switched to the blues. He made his first big record, *Three O’Clock in the Morning*, in 1949, but his first real taste of success came from his 1970 release *The Thrill is Gone*. He achieved his first gold record (500,000 sold) in 1975, when *Together for the First Time* flew off the shelves of record stores; *DDT*, Sep 11, 1976, p.44; “I’m Tired: Performer Sings Blues,” *DDT*, Nov 22, 1976, p.8.
The Economic Development Administration (EDA), a federal agency, awarded well over one hundred grants to fund much-needed construction projects in localities across the country in early 1977. The city of Greenville was considered for an allocation of $885,000 to build a new multi-purpose convention center beside the expo building on Airport Road. After meeting with the county board of supervisors in June, the city council announced its “moral commitment” to spend as much as $230,000 on the construction of a new facility to replace the expo building. While the funding decision came somewhat out of the blue, the architectural design of the new building was “not a quickly gone into thing.” The finals plans for the new convention center, however, did not expand too far beyond the limits of the WCEC; the barn-like structure cost over one million dollars and seated only 2,500 people—the same number accommodated by the bleachers in the expo building.\(^{809}\)

The hasty decision to spend tax revenue on the center sparked much criticism among the citizens of Greenville. Former city councilor Bob May blasted the council’s decision to fund the project, charging that design plans for the convention center had long been “hidden from the public” during an important stage of revisions. As Mayor Bill Burnley admitted, the original plan was to renovate the expo building into an arena that could serve up to eighty thousand people and attract popular recording artists and large theatrical productions such as “Holiday on Ice.” The original design, however, was unacceptable to some influential power brokers in Greenville. Due to “the special interests of people keeping livestock and interested in horse shows,” the mayor admitted, local officials had to abandon the original focus on entertainment

and settle on a much more practical, agricultural design.\textsuperscript{810} Robert Jones, president of the Delta Music Association, decried the new “flat-floored, barn-type structure” as “not conducive for artistic events,” and he considered the structure as a “gross waste of tax revenues, a disservice to the community which expects better and an example of utter disregard for the people most interested in seeing that cultural events to further enhance our community are continued in a setting conducive to their presentation.”\textsuperscript{811} Jones also disliked the location of the convention center at the fairgrounds, because the city would not receive economic benefits from an institution it had “no control over.” The folks coming to the center for a one-night concert, he asserted, would “never spend a dime in the city of Greenville, except at a couple of places on the highway.”\textsuperscript{812}

Despite the protestations of the Delta Music Association as well as some local politicians, the city council and county board of supervisors had made up their minds, accepted bids, and hired a contractor to begin construction on the new facility within ninety days of receiving the grant. The unsightly nature of the construction site at the fairgrounds dissuaded two consultants from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) from locating the initial Delta Blues Festival at the fairgrounds. The failure of local officials to provide an alternative site to the waterfront, which the consultants deemed too “commercial,” went so far as to make them to consider staging the event in Yazoo City. The rural community of Freedom Village was certainly not the first choice of MACE or the NEA consultants. Located not far from the farm of James Mixon, who hosted the 1970 Delta Festival in the field behind his country store, Freedom Village was home to eighteen families in 1978. Neither well-designed nor successful, however, the rural and poor

\textsuperscript{811} Ibid.
setting of Freedom Village—four hundred acres of cropland at the end of about twelve miles of twisting, narrow farm roads, “pig trails,” southeast of Greenville—became attached to the aesthetic of the Delta Blues Festival and its initial mission to document, preserve, and promote the roots music of local blues musicians.  

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CHAPTER FIVE
THE RADICAL PSYCHOLOGY OF WORTH LONG IN BLACK FOLKLIFE
AND THE LAND WHERE THE BLUES BEGAN

The Macmillan Company published the autobiography of folklorist and song collector John Lomax, *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter*, on his eighty-ninth birthday, about the same time an old friend and insurance salesman, Charles Cason, made repeated attempts to arrange a celebration for the folk music authority and ballad hunter in Greenville, Mississippi. Not feeling well, he initially refused the invitation, but he later agreed to make the trip upon learning that his son, Alan, whom he had not seen in a year, would accompany him to the Queen City for two days of lectures and performances. In October 1947, Cason announced that John and Alan Lomax would speak at the local schools and perform at the Greenville Travel Club’s annual ladies dinner on January 24, 1948. Mayor George Archer even signed a proclamation in recognition of the anniversary of his Mississippi birth; the mayor declared that January 24, 1948 was “Lomax Day” in Greenville, and the unique affair hoped to attract future Dixie-crat and

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815 Cason announced that he would sale 230 tickets at $2.50 each for a concert featuring the John Lomax folk singers on January 24. “John Lomax and his son, Allan, have been making records of folk songs for the Library of Congress for fifteen years,” Cason explained, “John, who is a native of Mississippi, will soon be retiring on his ranch in Texas, and this will be the last public appearance of the two together. Allan is in charge, of Decca recordings of folk songs and also plays and sings on the Mutual Broadcasting System.” Before singing for the Annual Ladies Night Dinner at the hotel, the Lomax singers will also be presented to the local school children; see, “Walker Say Legal Whiskey Finds More State Friends,” *DDT*, Dec 21, 1947, p.1.
Governor Fielding Wright as well as other luminaries such as newspaper editor Hodding Carter. As one jealous journalist in Texas commented: “On this day two prophets—best known as scribes who have spent the better part of a lifetime faithfully recording the American scene—will receive honor in…Greenville, on the Mississippi River—metropolis of the Delta country…Through a 24-hour music festival, the entire community will turn out to sing old-time songs and dance to old fiddle tunes.”817 On Sunday, the two ballad hunters even planned to record a complete hour of services at an African American church in the Delta, which piqued the interest of several admirers and members of the Greenville Travel Club, such as Jack Underwood, who intended to accompany the two folklorists and witness the recording session.

“It sounds wonderful,” local columnist Louise Crump declared, “and it will be [wonderful], according to some who have heard them.”819

John Lomax had recently advised his son Alan to read William Alexander Percy’s *Lanterns on the Levee*. Having been born in the town of Goodman in Holmes County after the Civil War, he wanted his son to gain a better understanding of a “bourgeois Southerner” from the Delta.820 Percy and Lomax held firm to a discourse on paternalism, which conceived of African Americans as “lovable but childlike.” Only the positive, civilizing influence of good white folks, they believed, stopped the retrogression of blacks to a savage, primitive way of life.821

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818 “Underwoods to Visit Here,” *DDT*, Jan 16, 1948, p.5.
820 In 1869, John Lomax was just a boy when he migrated with his parents from Holmes County, Mississippi by ox-cart to a farm in Bosque County, Texas, where he began his lifetime pursuit of writing down folksongs. He went to school at Weatherford and in 1897 received a degree from the University of Texas. John Lomax did not agree with one professor at Texas University, who termed his cowboy songs “tawdry, cheap and unworthy.” When he went to Harvard for postgraduate study in 1903, Lomax showed his ballads to scholar and critic George Lyman Kittredge, who affirmed the significance of his life work. John Lomax and his son Alan, a gifted and devoted partner, collected cowboy, African American, and Mexican folksongs, tunes, ballads and tales and transcribed more than 10,000 phonograph records for the Archives of American Folk Song in the Library of Congress.
moderate, paternalist view on race was reflective of many other whites in Greenville, particularly in the historical pageants developed for Independence Day, which often cast blacks in stereotypical roles, offered bucolic images that fit squarely with the Lost Cause, and staged the performance of “negro spirituals” to invoke the melodies of the antebellum South.

The elder Lomax arrived in Greenville on a train and a local crowd of folk enthusiasts met him at the station and whisked him away to what turned into a very-close-to-homecoming party. The journey to Greenville was shaping up as a happy reunion between father and son, one Texas writer lamented, during which the two men “would have talked about their work together to Greenville audiences and with each other and sung the best of their songs. Later, on the plantations and penal farms, they would have discovered new songs…but it wasn’t to be that way. For John A. Lomax had come back to Mississippi to make a longer journey of discovery alone.”

As John spoke with old friends and even sang a few songs, he suddenly fell to the floor and went motionless. Having suffered a massive heart attack, his hosts transported him to King’s Daughter Hospital, where he remained for the next week struggling to regain consciousness. John Lomax died a couple of days later at King Daughter’s Hospital in Greenville on January 27, 1948. His two sons, Alan and John Jr., took his body by train to Austin, Texas, and two days later Reverend Edmund Heinsohn conducted his funeral at the Weed-Corley Chapel. John Lomax was buried in Oakwood Cemetery.

Alan Lomax, believing himself aware of his father’s wishes, returned to Greenville to carry out the programs scheduled for him and his father. He flew from Dallas to Jackson where members of the Travelers Club picked him up and carried him to Greenville. He appeared first

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822 “The Lomaxes-and the Songs of a Nation,” *San Antonio (TX) Express*, Jan 24, 1948, p.2
823 “Lomax Still Gravely Ill; Son Will Sing For Travelers Club,” *DDT*, Jan 26, 1948, p.1.
before students and teachers at the E. E. Bass auditorium, and then in front of students in Leland, Arcola, Hollandale, Glen Allan and St. Rose of Lima Academy. At the banquet on Saturday evening at Hotel Greenville, Lomax thanked the citizens for opening their homes and hearts during such a trying time for his family. “It would be father’s wish,” he exclaimed, “that the show must go on, and I promise to put on the best performance of all my life.”

The concert was indeed a “memorable and heartwarming event,” according to DDT editor Hodding Carter, “one which Alan’s listeners will not forget.”

In his grief, Alan Lomax almost reflexively made some field recordings in the Delta and his home state of Texas. He recorded the sermon, the hymns, and the spirituals that filled the air inside Rose Hill Baptist Church, of Greenville, and continued to record at other churches until he entered the church for his father’s funeral, at which time the music stopped for the young folklorist. Having spent the previous year estranged from his father and undergoing intense psychoanalysis, Alan developed a firm belief in the processes and rhetoric of analysis. According to one biographer, he emerged from “strenuous” examination spirited, confident, and “free from his past,” which, he believed, allowed him to better understand “the psychodynamics of the arts of the poor and marginalized.”

Even though he retreated to the same type of work pioneered by his father, Alan believed he would soon come into his own and take the study of folklore to new, previously inconceivable, heights.

The death of John Lomax, the subsequent performance of his grieving son, and the renewed, analytical vigor of his campaign to document local and regional manifestations of the folk coincided with the growing concern among African Americans that they were in serious

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danger of “losing their birthright as makers of true folk music.” By “paying too much attention to European music” and abandoning “their own native music,” W.C. Handy told one reporter, black musicians had largely given up “native American Negro music” in the 1940s, which whites quickly recognized, lamented ever so briefly, and embraced as their own, even if adopted, cultural product.\textsuperscript{829} “The whites are taking the blues and spirituals away from us,” he argued, “changing them up some [and] using them and making money from them.” Having taken the blues from other black musicians during his southern travels, added some traditional and original lyrics, commodified and composed some of the most popular songs of all time, Handy expressed much displeasure as well as apprehension about commenting on white appropriation. He did not, moreover, embrace open protest as a vehicle for social change, but he held an acute disdain for racial discrimination. Having been ridiculed during his travels through the South, Handy began running a “bootleg business” distributing black periodicals, such as the Indianapolis Freeman, Chicago Defender, and Voice of the Negro newspapers, in southern locales that considered it a grievous offense, which demonstrated his willingness to risk his own life to encourage African Americans to take part in the Great Migration.\textsuperscript{830} In 1948, after coming to the realization that whites had extracted great amounts of wealth from the black community, he went so far as to exhort, “I think our people should keep their heritage.”\textsuperscript{831} Handy was certainly not alone in his assertion.

Indeed, it took a courageous member of the black community to engage with elements of the past that many thought best left behind. The education and training of Worth Long in the field of folklore would be unique, unlettered, germinating among the people, and growing up in

\textsuperscript{829} “Negroes Losing Birthright as Makers of Folk Music,” \textit{DDT}, Nov 30, 1948, p.10.
\textsuperscript{831} “Negroes Losing Birthright as Makers of Folk Music,” \textit{DDT}, Nov 30, 1948, p.10.
the struggle. It was his thirst for authenticity and truth in the privileged, white normative world, however, that allowed him to recognize the value of the information in the collections of white folklorists, such as Lomax. The same spirit that drove the activism of Worth Long as a student in Arkansas and a SNCC worker in Selma also impelled his actions as a folklorist. He compared his roles as a community organizer and folklorist to his father’s role as a “circuit rider” in the church. “I’m out there riding a cultural circuit,” he explained, “It’s the same basic thing I did with SNCC…I travel the same zone, serving the same communities.”

Yet, southern black communities were in a state of transition due to integration and the restoration of the black franchise; encountering a new stage of the struggle, African Americans moved beyond voter registration campaigns to focus on economic development and education initiatives, particularly the development of a black consciousness. Worth Long placed a “high value” on reflecting the majesty and grace of cultural traditions back onto the original communities that nurtured them, a concept reflected in performance of the blues. “The rural blues men,” as Julius Lester noted, “were intent on telling their listeners what [they] already knew, but could not articulate…Even the most personal blues [song] never said, ‘Look at me!’ Invariably, it said, ‘Look at you!’”

In his enthusiastic cultural mission, Long travelled constantly and remained in the field, which made him difficult to contact sometimes. To request his assistance, however, some compatriots simply put the word out in the air, as he remained in semi-frequent contact with a few good friends. Despite his peripatetic tendencies, Bernice Reagon asserted, “he always turned up when you needed him.” Though he sometimes vanished without saying a word once his work

833 Julius Lester, “Country Blues Comes to Town?: The View From the Other Side of the Tracks,” Sing Out! 14:4 (September 1964): 38.
was done, his tireless sense of mission on the “circuit” mandated that, as photographer and
compatriot Roland Freeman put it, he was always “on the case.”

In his field research into local folk traditions, Long assumed a shared authority with the
musicians and artists, which proffered a mutual level of respect and established trust in the black
community. Drawing on the organizing principles of Myles Horton and Ella Baker, Long
allowed enough room in a cultural project for local people to feel comfortable with augmenting
and adding to it. He believed it crucial to develop a strong second line of leadership, who, in his
absence, could not only hold the line, but also escalate the size and scope of the original project.
Myles Horton defined the organizer’s role as drawing out of people “what they feel they need to
do.” Considering the potential for “creative” and “much more productive” strategies among
local people, Ella Baker insisted “it was useless to try to put the brakes on, because it was
“unleashed enthusiasm…an overflow of a dam that had been penned up for years, and it had to
run its course.” Coming out of his organizing activities in SNCC, Long maintained a certain
level of professional malleability, or the strategic deference to local authority, which served to
build confidence in the community’s abilities to change the original program, making it their
own. While he served as a consultant on various cultural projects and helped organize a host of

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835 Ted Ownby, director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, recalled his participation at one event on
campus at the University of Mississippi, after which he hiked to the nearest highway and hitchhiked back to Atlanta;
see, Roland L. Freeman, *A Tribute to Worth Long, Still on the Case: A Pioneer’s Continuing Commitment*
836 In one 2011 essay, Michael Frisch asked readers to recall that his previous work was carefully titled *A Shared
Authority* to emphasize that, in the work of oral and public historians, shared authority exists in a specific time and
place; authority is not something that scholars possess and decide to share (or not); see, Michael Frisch, *A Shared
Press, 1990) as well as “From A Shared Authority to the Digital Kitchen and Back,” in *Letting Go? Sharing
Heritage, 2011), 127; Elizabeth Duclos-Orsello, “Shared Authority: The Key to Museum Education as Social
837 Worth Long, “Cultural Organizing and Participatory Research,” in *The Arts of Black Folk* (New York:
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, 1991) p. 35.
folk festivals, it was Long’s field research in Mississippi during the 1970s that grounded his approach to field work, solidified his reputation as a folklorist, and encouraged Mississippians to realize the political, economic, and psychological power of programs centered on African American culture.

In the tumultuous and treacherous late-1960s, Worth Long remained an influential force in black freedom struggle, particularly in its initiatives to perpetuate the folk culture of black folks in the South. In 1968, Long served as a guide for the field research of kindred spirit and folksinger Julius Lester, who sat on the board of the Newport Folk Foundation and whose outrage over the continuing plight of African Americans inspired such works as *Look Out, Whitey!: Black Power’s Gon’ Get Your Mama!* (1968) and *Revolutionary Notes* (1969). Lester had grown up and studied in the South, receiving a bachelor’s degree from Fisk University in 1960, and he had been interested in folklore and photography since childhood. When members of SNCC approached him about their interest in revitalizing and documenting folk tradition in Mississippi, he bought two Nikon cameras—one with a 55mm lens and the other with a 105mm lens—and travelled throughout the state with the help of Worth Long, who had developed a network of relationships with activists and folk artists across the South.839 In the fall of 1967, folk music columnist Israel “Izzy” Young expressed his enthusiasm over the emergence of black folklorists, such as Worth Long and Julius Lester, who snatched “out of incorporeal air…the notion that there is more to the blues” than chords and structure. Young, in fact, declared himself no longer “an expert on Negro, Black, and Afro-American folk-life, folk-speech, folk-

belief and folk-blues.” His sentiment reverberated in the halls of the Smithsonian Institute, which attracted little to no minority visitors in the late 1960s, and Festival of American Folklife (FOAF) director Ralph Rinzler realized that cultural representation was a political minefield. Beginning at the height of the Black Power Movement, therefore, he relied on black activists, scholars, and musicians such as Bernice Reagon, Julius Lester, and Worth Long, who established the African Diaspora Advisory Group, to develop programs on African-derived cultures, help increase the involvement of local blacks, and eliminate problematic representations of black culture.

Having met and conversed with him at several Newport Folk Festivals, Ralph Rinzler eagerly offered Worth Long one of his first opportunities as a professional folklorist—locating folk artists in Arkansas for the 1970 FOAF. Long also did some work on his PhD in folk culture at Union Graduate School in Yellow Springs, Ohio, an institution which, due to discontent with the traditional models of higher education, emphasized interdisciplinary research projects with considerable social relevance. His doctoral work was placed on hold at the behest of Rinzler and the Smithsonian Institution, which invited the state of Mississippi to be one of the two states featured in the Festival of American Folklife. While some members of the House of Representatives opposed the appropriation, arguing that participants would “weave baskets and make mud jugs” and demonstrate “how backward we are,” the state legislature ended up appropriating $178,400 to finance the state’s participation, which allowed Dick Hulan—who had a special interest in religious folk songs and coordinated the state of Kentucky the previous

year—and Worth Long to scour the state for its best 125 folk artists, craftsmen, musicians, artisans, and farmers.\textsuperscript{843}

While many of the musicians and folk artists who made the trip to the nation’s capital in 1974 were already well-known, Worth Long had made several significant discoveries over the years of such artists as Reverend Leon Pinson, Reverend Boyd Rivers, and Greenville vocalist Joe Savage. On a scouting expedition later in 1976, Long visited Madison County and discovered multi-instrumentalist Clyde Maxwell, which led to subsequent performances in Washington D.C. and the state capital of Jackson, where he performed alongside James “Son” Thomas for the blues lectures of native folklorist Bill Ferris. Dr. Byrle Kynerd, of the Old Capitol Museum, served as the general coordinator for the FOAF program of the Mississippi program, but the social capital and resources of Worth Long were crucial to its success and allowed him to conduct the most extended and important period of serious field research in his career.

The Smithsonian also sent an experienced photographer and Baltimore-native named Roland Freeman to visually document the field research of Long in Mississippi. Though he started taking pictures in the Air Force during the mid-1950s with a Brownie Hawkeye camera, it was not until the 1963 March on Washington that he began taking photography seriously. In 1968, Freeman worked as a photographer for SCLC; he participated in and documented the Poor People’s Campaign as well as the Mule Wagon Train from Marks, Mississippi to the nation’s capital in the early summer of 1968. Freeman also received some recognition for his coverage of the Watergate scandal, but he found it tedious working as a stringer for \textit{Time} magazine and grew

“tired of running with the pack” as a White House photographer. His true passion was the
documentation of folk culture, and he jumped at the opportunity to return to Mississippi and
work alongside Worth Long. Inspired by the socially conscious Depression-era photography of
Gordon Parks and Roy DeCarava, the photographers for the Farm Security Administration, as
well as folklorist Zora Neale Hurston, who he had the opportunity to meet as a teenager,
Freeman possessed a unique photographic vision that captured a spiritual “sense of being” and
reflected the “sense of meaning that people should have of themselves.”

Long and Freeman respected each other’s work and maintained an excellent working
relationship. In describing their initial meetings, Freeman admitted, “It was almost like I’d
found somebody I’d been looking for, for the last twenty years.” Long, in short order, also
realized that “this is somebody. I can work with this fellow.” Freeman could also “relate” to
Long, who not only understood black culture in the South but also the frustrations of taking
photographs that reflected the true nature of folk tradition. “Without my even knowing,”
Freeman contends, “he was a teacher” and “I was being taught.”

The two men, however, possessed some fundamental differences in style. Worth Long
took life a bit easier than Freeman, a workaholic, who needed light and wanted to get out and
take pictures at sunrise. Long, on the other hand, tended to sleep in during the day, which gave
rise to some friction between them. “So it got to the point where we would travel together for a
while,” Freeman explained, “and then he would go off and do his thing and I would do mine, and
we’d come back together.” By periodically separating and covering separate paths, the two

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844 This ending quote comes from Worth Long’s description of Freeman’s work in C. Gerald Fraser, “How the March on Washington Shaped a Man’s Life,” NYT, Apr 18, 1981, p.10.
848 Ibid.
documentarians not only mitigated rising tensions, making it possible for them to work together for extended lengths of time, but also covered twice the amount of ground.

On one important solo excursion, for example, Worth Long met a sixteen-year-old musician in Holmes County named Lonnie Pitchford, who possessed the ability to make and play the one-stringed instrument known as the diddley bow. The peripatetic folklorist was so amazed that he introduced the talented youth to veteran blues guitarists Eugene Powell and Robert Jr. Lockwood, who served as his mentors and taught him the intricacies of the Delta blues. At the 1974 FOAF, an eighteen-year-old Pitchford played the blues with Sam Chatmon—two musicians “apart in age but together in their music style”—while sitting on the steps in front of the Lincoln Memorial. Long and Freeman sent other blues and gospel musicians, untrained woodcarvers, and a needle painter to represent the folk culture of Mississippi at the 1974 FOAF. The festival also included “gospel blues” guitarist Leon Pinson, of Cleveland; blues musicians James “Son” Thomas and Joe Cooper, of Leland; broom bass player Cleveland Jones, of Leland, and the needle-painting of Ethel Mohammad, of Belzoni. The focus on folk art often translated to old artists, particularly in regards to white scholars’ valorization of the acoustic country blues records of the 1920s and 1930s, which led some critics to conclude that real blues was extinct. “People keep saying that the blues is dead,” Long declared, but he had found evidence of several living black music traditions, including blues. He exclaimed that there were “whole carloads full of people” in the Delta, who were “young [and] playing the blues,” such as the amazing Lonnie

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849Naples (FL) Daily News, July 12, 1974, p.6D.
850Like other artists at the event, Mohammad declared her work the result of “creative inspiration,” which blends “primitive” drawing and needlework. In her experiences raising eight children, she wanted to capture important moments so she decided to create her “little pictures; “Mid-Deltans Promote Cultural Heritage,” DDT, June 16, 1974, p.2.
Pitchford. African American poet and writer Tom Dent, of New Orleans, later agreed, “It’s not dead up here” in the Delta.\(^{851}\)

The convergence of attitudes among some young black artists from the Delta towards black folk traditions and the Black Arts Movement comes through in the character of Greenville native Wilson Lee, a talented, young woodcarver who Long also sent to the 1974 FOAF. He possessed no formal training as a wood worker when he started carving at his family’s workshop in 1968. His father worked with wood and kept plenty of materials in his workshop, as well as hammers and chisels, which he used at first to carve canoes, whistles and medallions, honing his basic skills with tools and developing a feel for several types of woods. Lee’s artistic talents blossomed in high school and earned recognition during Black History Week in 1970, when he won first place in the displays division of a black arts competition at T.L. Weston High School with his pecan woodcarvings, such as *The Black Man* and *Hand of a Slave*.\(^{852}\) *DDT* arts editor Ben Wasson, after later viewing his woodcarvings at the William Alexander Percy Library, described the “powerful group of sculptures” as nothing “namby pamby or pretty,” only “youth in protest, youth with feelings of bitterness, youth with compassion not used to soften but used to bring even more force to such works shown here as *Black Power*, and others bearing titles indicative of a manifest struggle.”\(^{853}\) With all his carvings from native trees, such as blue gum, pecan, oak, and cottonwood, Wasson focused on the undeniable “vitality,” and “the promise of better work yet to come from this young man, who, obviously, knows African primitive art, but has not imitated it.”\(^{854}\) Being both “abstract and expressive,” Lee declared that his art grew out of the “impulses of social reactions.” One piece, a multi-faceted and twisted face chiseled on dark

\(^{851}\) “Interview with Worth Long,” recorded by Tom Dent, July 29, 1979, Greenville, Mississippi, Tom Dent papers.


\(^{853}\) Ben Wasson, “It’s Not the Usual Greenville Art Show,” *DDT*, June 11, 1972, p.29.

\(^{854}\) Ibid.
wood, demonstrated the artists’ ability to break from prevailing racial discourse and express his personal vision of blackness. “If I’m totally free,” he explained, “I can look any way I want.”

Lee perceived his work as a form of communication, and he tried to create art that represented his views on politics and human rights. “I want to build an appreciation of art,” Lee insisted, as well as publicize the beautiful fact that “some good things [were] going on in the black community.”

Lee studied art at Mary Holmes College before transferring to Mississippi Valley State University, and he had exhibited his work at the Greenville Mall, Mississippi State University, and the 1973 PUSH Expo in Chicago, which featured several a new generation of black entertainers such as Marvin Gaye, Curtis Mayfield, Isaac Hayes, and Roberta Flack. While he believed that people were “becoming more aware of folk art,” Lee recognized that black folks had considered it “old fashioned” for a long time. He attributed the new appreciation of folk artists and blues musicians to the increasing awareness of nature, animist religion, and the cultural syncretism of European and African traditions. Black “people are going back to the earth,” he insisted, and “becoming more aware of nature,” which increased the value of traditional African American cultural traditions. It also heightened the impetus of scholarly inquiries into the extent of African cultural retention in the United States. In one rare poem, Lee expresses the animist influence on black artists:

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When I’m carving,
It’s best to be careful,
Because sometime I
Think
That wood has feelings,
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Lee’s wood carvings reflected much more than black pride and a respect for nature. He also wanted to depict an accurate expression of day to day life in the black communities of the Delta. Partly due to his familiarity with several local blues musicians in Washington County, Lee developed an attractive cultural aesthetic that reflected a host of local traditions. “I feel that these people [blues musicians] tell it like it is,” he argued, “They just go on and say what’s on their mind,” which made him simply “crazy about the blues.” While his poem and woodcarvings certainly reflected the animist religious practices of his ancestors, Lee’s work also aimed to make a political statement about black anger, tell the disconsolate and despairing truth about American society, and provide a clear, majestic image of black culture in the South.

Like the animist artistic revelation of Wilson Lee Jr., the blues celebrated the harsh realities, bleak futures, indomitable spirit and joyous strains of black life in the secular world, the real world, in which the spirit resided in all things. The black spirituals developed out of the more-pronounced religious and cultural syncretism that existed in the United States, but the genre served as evidence of African cultural survivals, which continued to inform the music of African Americans. The spiritual emerged in the setting of the black church, where the enslaved sang about biblical figures in their coded pleas for freedom. Music not intended for performance in the church, such as work songs and hollers, differed in many ways from spirituals, but they too, “in substance or form, directly or indirectly, derived from African ritual and performance

practice.” While the influence and melodies of the spirituals extended outside the church and made an impact on the blues, the largess of the secular music was deemed unsuitable for performance in the worship services of black churches. “Christian music and that which thrived outside the church,” Peter R. Aschoff argues, reflected the “two different spiritual foundations” of African Americans: Christianity and the animist African religions of Yoruba and West African Vodun. Willie Dixon, in one interview with folklorist Worth Long, asserted that the blues were “dedicated to the earth and the facts of life,” but the spirituals and the later gospels dealt primarily with “heaven and after death.” The two black musical traditions often represented contrasting values systems in terms of both everyday morality and supernatural philosophy.

The same impulses—anger, despair, pride, and reverence—activated the field research of Worth Long and Roland Freeman in the mid-1970s. After a couple of non-musical folk artists scheduled to appear at the 1974 Festival of American Folklife “took sick and died” before having the chance to showcase their work, a sense of urgency arose in the two field researchers, which reflected the earnestness and resolve that earlier fueled the Black Power Movement. “It’s a damn shame none of this is being documented,” they complained, perhaps too many times, and their lamentations soon evolved into historical imperatives, instilling within them a “moral

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obligation to do” the important work of searching out and preserving black folks traditions.862

“We saw that there were no arts or cultural projects or exhibits that were being developed in the South,” Long explained, “and the traditional culture, as we knew it, especially in the black community, was dying.”863 Initially funding the project out of their own pockets, Freeman and Long descended on twelve southern counties “where they thought it would be possible to find” black folk artists and bearers of traditions “that might have African links.” The dogged commitment of the duo to seek out the purveyors of older, disappearing artistic styles as well as the largely-unknown, local musicians who performed more “traditional,” or “dying,” forms of music is what made the endeavor so “important.” Due to previous neglect and a serious dearth of research into black expressive culture, the duo wrote a grant proposal for the Mississippi Folklife Project—submitted through the Center for Southern Folklore in Memphis—and received funding from the National Endowment for the Arts.864 By documenting a “rapidly vanishing lifestyle practiced in rural Mississippi by black folks,” the project hoped to preserve “valuable material elements of traditional African culture” still evident in Mississippi.865

The project reflected the blossoming internalization of black consciousness in Freeman and Long, each of whom had managed to seize control of their own self-image, validate that image through exhibition and practice, re-negotiate their relationship to white cultural power brokers, and initiate a campaign to destroy the self-hatred of black Mississippians. Having leavened his rage with reason and secured his identity through self-definition, Long renewed his

864 The Center for Southern Folklore received $10,000 in 1974 and $37,251 in 1975 from the NEA “to assist projects that nourish and disseminate the many folk cultural traditions of the United States through festivals, residencies, tours, exhibits, media documentation, and other activities.” In 1976, the NEA provided $8,905 to the CSF under “General Programs;” see, National Endowment for the Arts, Annual Reports, 1974-1976.
commitment to the black freedom struggle through an avowed confidence in inter-personal relationships. The Folklife Project was a well-articulated critique of the “culture of poverty” that highlighted the relationship between black culture and militant activism. He miraculously managed to secure an alliance with more overt, political proponents of black power as well as more conservative, middle class blacks who benefitted from the hard-won successes of the Civil Rights Movement. In his work, Long invoked viable, supportive elements of black culture to further the psychological liberation of African Americans, many of whom, he believed, had not yet begun the self-affirmation process. Though sympathetic to their continued psychological plight, he remained frustrated with the failures of the civil rights movement and struggled to destroy the thinly-veiled self-hatred of southern blacks, many of whom rejected the concept of a notable African past and viewed the jazz and blues music as “low-down and dirty” expressions, seemingly unwelcome in the mainstream of American life.866

One music critic believed that such preservation efforts, in fact, sounded the death knell, or the beginning of the end for traditional black culture in Mississippi. Tom Bethell, a British transplant who moved to New Orleans in 1965 to conduct research jazz research and worked on New Orleans district attorney Jim Garrison’s investigation of the JFK assassination, questioned the motives of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in a brief history of cultural evolution and preservation in America. “The Muses,” in the late nineteenth century, “took up residence” in the lowliest of American quarters—Storyville in New Orleans, the saloons of Sedalia, Missouri; and the plantations in the Mississippi Delta—and the birth of American culture occurred with such speed that it dealt a fatal blow to high European culture; “the only thing left to do was preserve it in the formaldehyde of museums and concert halls.” The new

notion of popular culture as something everyone could enjoy, which made it undeserving of
government funding, “never did appeal to those who (as in Europe) saw in art an opportunity to
stake out a claim to superior sensibility.” Concerned about the unstated agenda behind federal
funding for the arts, Bethell feared that the motive of the NEA was to preserve, perhaps even
restore, European traditions that were “either obsolete…or else frankly elitist.”867 After its
founding in 1965, the leaders of the NEA certainly seemed elitist—defining excellence as
modern art and promoting its expansion—but after American defeat in Vietnam, the Cold War
political consensus broke down and the NEA diversified its definitions of excellence, promoting
a new multicultural ideal and helping to foster heightened levels of cultural democracy.868

The criticisms of Tom Bethell, however, were not limited to high European culture. While conducting research for his book on New Orleans jazz giant George Lewis, he attended
one of the earliest incarnations of the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, which inspired his
denunciation of all efforts to “embalm” cultural traditions, insinuating that the act of preservation
was in and of itself an indicator that traditions “must be moribund.”869 In the 1920s, Bethell
noted, there was such a high demand for “live music that life itself came close to being a jazz
festival” in New Orleans. Even though funeral parades that included live music had all but
disappeared in the 1970s, each and every infrequent exhibition of the “dying” tradition attracted
a multitude of curious onlookers, anthropologists and ethnographers.870 Another scholar
believed that such cultural exhibitions were best “understood” as a “dramaturgy of power” that

868 Donna M. Binkiewicz, Federalizing the Muse: United States Arts Policy and the National Endowment for the
“consigns to oblivion” all the “cultural trash” that society had rejected over the years. While the NEA did not hope to restore high cultural traditions in Mississippi, the Folklife Project received one of many grants contributing to its successful promotion of a pluralist vision of American culture in the 1970s. Like the anthropologists in the French Quarter, Long and Freeman developed a strong attraction to traditional music and other indigenous art forms so closely identified with black people and a purportedly disappearing way of life in the South. The Mississippi Folklife Project, in this sense, not only received funding out of the pluralist emphasis on diversity, but it also developed out of a nostalgic, nationalist impulse to preserve endangered cultural traditions. In the face of annihilation through the “mass production of records, turntables, and jukeboxes,” the two former civil rights workers and veteran documentarians seemed as if a higher power guided and compelled them to remain in the field for more than a year.

The folklorist and the photographer conducted a total of sixteen months of field research and documentation, out of which they fabricated a massive exhibit at the Old Capitol Museum in Jackson titled “Folkroots—Images of Black Mississippi Folklife 1974-76.” Museum director Patti Carr Black was impressed with their “sensitivity to the pride and care with black artisans work,” and she believed that Freeman’s photographs told the story of the “people behind the craft [and] the integration of people’s lives with the products themselves.” Black admitted that the state museum had not adequately recognized “the value of black folk art,” and she made sure to note how the exhibit on black culture served as an important step forward for the institution.

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873 Patti Carr Black worked as the curator of exhibits at MDAH for several years before becoming the director of the Old Capital. Her whole focus from the moment she walked in and had that opportunity was to get away from military and political history that had been the focus at the time and go towards cultural history—particularly literature, art, and music. She called herself “sort of a missionary about art”; see, Patti Carr Black, “A Portrait of
“For black people this show is of tremendous importance,” Freeman declared, “We’ve been told for so long that we’re nothing, that we came from nowhere, that we had no culture. Most young people are trying to get away from the old times, but here they can see their roots in this country.” Since several of the artists featured in the exhibit had died in the past few years, the exhibit of Long and Freeman served their mission to document the older purveyors of folk art in Mississippi. Though a host of folklorists and other scholars documented the tradition bearers of the Delta, Freeman insisted that “most of the people…were forgotten along the wayside.” The massive exhibit consisting of 150 of Freeman’s photographs and a collection of black folk art including quilts, white oak baskets, outdoor yard sculpture, funerary sculpture, and homemade musical instruments, served as a corrective to the state’s cultural hierarchy by legitimizing, displaying, and enhancing the popular image of black folk traditions in Mississippi.874

The Folklife Project not only challenged official culture in Mississippi, but its display in the capital museum offered a comforting vision to liberal-minded whites and projected a political statement about the growing influence of black power. In the beginning, the duo wanted the project to benefit and encourage development of the artists; thus, they agreed that “the first ones to see what we’d been doing would be the people themselves.” Long believed that one of the most valuable elements of the research project was the “feedback experience,” which held the power to improve the self-respect and increase the amount of self-pride in black Mississippians. “We’d show folks the photographs we’d taken of them,” he explained, “and they’d look at themselves and at their lives and say, ‘well, what do you know—that’s us.’”875 If nothing else,

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875 Susan Linee, “Black Culture in Rural Mississippi Documented,” Mobile (AL) Register, Aug 21, 1977, p.20
Freeman believed, the Mississippi Folklife Project tried “to build sturdy bridges across [divisions of] race and class,” approach people as participants and not as subjects, and aid participants in “developing their own voices.”

On September 9, 1977, in honor of the first exhibition by a black photographer in the museum, Patti Carr Black scheduled a black folk concert with gospel and blues music. With the sounds of gospel music and the Delta blues permeating the air, “hands clapped, feet stomped, [and] heads nodded to and for to the musical vibrations,” according to one writer for MACE’s newspaper, The Voice. “It was a hot time in ye ole Capitol Museum that night!” The concert featured a spirit-filled quartet out of Jackson called the Heavenly Gospel Singers, Copiah County native blues musician Houston Stackhouse, who recently returned from a five-month tour of the Scandinavian countries, and one of the youngest Delta blues artists actively performing, Lonnie Pitchford, of Holmes County, who recently toured Canada with the famed Taj Mahal. By staging the folk concert on the opening night of the exhibit, Patti Carr Black hoped to instill within whites a “heightened awareness of Black folk art and traditions.” In the opinion of one writer for The Voice, the well-developed project was “truly one [that] all Americans, particularly Black Americans, can be proud.”

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879 Ibid.
GOING BACK TO THE LAND WHERE THE BLUES BEGAN

For Alan Lomax to return to Greenville, where his father had died, it took the development of portable and inexpensive video-tape equipment. It proved a watershed in the documentation of folk traditions in the 1970s, and it provided the spark that led to him back to the Queen City of the Delta.

His father’s tools of the trade had been pencil and paper, perhaps a few cylinder recordings, but the development of still photographs and sound recordings had provided greater insight into the voices and faces of folk artists. Having reawakened to the power of documentary film, contemporary folklorists managed to capture the context and drama of folk traditions. The use of videotape, moreover, provided ethnographers with ways of removing themselves, as well as other potentially corrupting, adulterating forces, which never quite seemed possible with only handwritten notes and old commercial records. By recording a “world of sound and motion” on video, folklorists offered an “immediate visual statement of what it ‘means’ to sing the blues, build a basket, or work in an assembly line.”

Having written so much and given so many talks about the possibilities of film in the field of folklore, Alan Lomax increasingly felt the need to demonstrate what folklorists might achieve with the medium.

Lomax would have never come to Mississippi in the summer of 1978 had it not been for the Worth Long, the indefatigable promoter of traditional black culture. 

880 There was three important folklorists who initiated field research in the Delta in the 1960s, and each of them contributed not only written documentation, but also audio recordings and films; see, William R. Ferris, *Blues from the Delta* and *Give My Poor Heart Ease*; and one by David Evans, *Big Road Blues: Tradition and Creativity in the Folk Blues* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). Judy Peiser is longtime director of the Center for Southern Folklife in Memphis, which documents and preserves Delta traditional culture.

881 The documentaries of Judy Peiser and Bill Ferris, who founded the Center for Southern Folklife in Memphis, were some of the most intimate, revealing folk documentaries of the 1970s, and the increasing availability of films provided the impetus for libraries to purchase audio/visual equipment and collect them. In 1977, Ferris and Peiser published an index of *American Folklore Films and Videotapes*. It listed almost two thousand films, as well as distribution and rental information, and featured about 170 stills from the movies; see, Robert Palmer, “Books: Folklore Guide,” *NYT*, Mar 25, 1977, p.73.

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filmmaker named Paula Tadlock, who had only recently attained her graduate degree in folklore and ethnomusicology and, in essence, created for herself the position of State Folklorist of Mississippi. Tadlock had also received her undergraduate degree in music and anthropology from the School of Music at Indiana University and completed a study of shape-note singing with a youth grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. In May 1978, she received another grant from the Corporation of Public Broadcasting for training to become a producer/director at the Mississippi Center for Educational Television. It was in Jackson, while working out of the PBS affiliate MS-ETV, that Worth Long approached her with an idea for a documentary film. He wanted to get some of the rural black folk artists whom he had discovered some airplay, and one of the best ways to do so was to engage a celebrity. Alan Lomax was an obvious choice to bring status and authority to the project. Tadlock and Long, therefore, arranged a meeting with the folklorist in early 1978.

Long had heard about Alan Lomax earlier, of course, through his music and field recordings. In fact, while investigating the folk music of black southerners, he recognized the impact of song hunters such as John and Alan Lomax on evidence related to the African-American experience. Long first met the folklorist at a workshop during the Newport Folk Festival, and Lomax was up front “talking about traditional ways.” “I listened,” he recalled, and “I didn’t know…who I was listening to, but I knew that what he was saying was true.” Long was not put off at the time—even though it was older white men (Lomax and Rinzler) who had helped introduce him to all sorts of ethnic cultural traditions and, more importantly, hitherto unknown histories of black musical traditions. Lomax was perhaps one of the few people who

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882 John Bishop, email to author, December 30, 2017.
884 “Grant Recipient,” Hattiesburg (MS) American, May 22, 1978, p.2D.
possessed and routinely expressed such knowledge in the United States. Not only had he visited prisons and recorded convicts, but he also earned certain privileges that allowed him entry into the black community without fear. “I didn’t have any real problems,” Long admitted, “with someone who had knowledge of my community that others could not get.”

At the workshop, Lomax introduced a wide range of folk musicians, many of whom were unknown to Long—zydeco musicians, French-Cajun musicians, and blues musicians, and it had such a profound effect on the civil rights veteran and amateur folklorist that he later enthusiastically exclaimed: “I was hooked. I was hooked.”

As the initial chapter demonstrated, one of the reasons that Alan Lomax was such an obvious choice was that he believed African Americans should “draw upon their own past, as all people have done before them…not be ashamed of their forefathers, but proud of them” for the courage, wit and beauty “that they continually expressed, even though they were for a time in bondage.” The “special flavor” of black secular music, he implored, need not “be given up in return for economic betterment.” On the contrary, Lomax stressed, in line with the subsequent exponents of the Black Power Movement, including Worth Long, that African Americans “should be encouraged to be themselves, to develop themselves in their own way as they move along freedom’s road.” With a strong record of support for the civil rights movement, Lomax envisioned a future that linked the struggle to a cultural revival in black communities across the nation, especially in southern locales such as Mississippi.

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886 Ibid.
888 Ibid.
Lomax had not been to the South since the late 1950s, however, and he was not confident that it was possible to find any good material in the deep South. In addition, Mississippi ETV already had a sixty-minute documentary about the blues in the pipeline. Written by Edward Cohen, produced by Rob Cooper, and directed by Walt Lowe, *Good Mornin’ Blues* featured one of the most comprehensive collections of Mississippi blues singers to appear in one film, and it may have killed the project of Long and Tadlock before it began if not for the husband of Alan Lomax’s niece, a hungry and ambitious young videographer named John Bishop. Bishop “fell in love with documentary film” while editing a film that his mother-in-law, Bess Lomax Hawes, had shot about an old-time fiddler. In the 1970s, he shot his first 16mm film and took on an ambitious, yet doomed, project to use the first color portapak camera and emerging computer managed videotape editing hardware to record part of the 1975 Festival of American Folklife. Even though Bishop tried to shoot another film on 16mm, he felt as if he was “hitting the wall.” Having once discussed “doing a film together” with Alan Lomax, Bishop got the call from Lomax to make a plan and budget for the meeting with Tadlock and Long. While none of them could conceive of a viable way to raise the estimated budget of over $100,000, Bishop did not want to watch the opportunity to make a PBS documentary to slip away. Thus, he suggested that they go on an “exploratory field trip” using the small amount of money available to procure a black and white portapak system, which made it possible to record video on location yet recorded at a lower quality than television studio cameras. Bishop recalled that even though “they bought it,”

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891 A Portapak is a battery-powered, self-contained video tape analog recording system that can be carried by one person; John Bishop, email to author, December 30, 2017.
Lomax still doubted the prospects of finding good musical subjects for the film. When they did not receive a hefty sum from PBS, they cut costs by shooting with videotape instead of film, and Lomax added to the project coffers with a grant from the Humanities Division of the Rockefeller Foundation.

Alan Lomax went to Mississippi over a week before the first day of filming to do some scouting with Worth Long, whose extensive recent fieldwork “provided an excellent foil to Alan’s experience,” according to John Bishop. Lomax wanted to take this time to audition some artists, and he encountered some promising subjects during his initial week with Long, whose work on the Folklife project had not only allowed him to become familiar with artists but also record collectors, concert promoters, and field researchers, such as guitarist and songwriter Bobby Ray Watson. Having been intimately involved with such blues singers as Fred McDowell and Joe Callicott, Watson possessed the ability to establish relationships with many native blues musicians. Since the late 1960s, he had worked very little with other researchers, but his sole contribution to the film proved important. Watson was the crucial contact who introduced the filmmakers to R.L. Burnside, with whom he used to play music and even record sometimes at the Memphis studio of Roland Janes. Even though they devised a list of potential subjects that might have kept a film crew working for a year, Bishop, Long, and Lomax managed to visit them all as well as a few more interesting individuals who happened to cross their path.

When Bishop arrived in Jackson, the engineers from Mississippi ETV were not holding any black and white portapaks. Rather, they were tweaking a rented $70,000 Ikegami camera.

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892 Lomax biography John Szwed describes the blues documentary project as if it was the brainchild of Lomax, but nothing could be farther from the truth, see John Szwed, Alan Lomax: The Man Who Recorded the World (New York: Penguin, 2010); Bishop, email to author, Dec 30, 2017.
“They didn’t have that kind of equipment at the station,” he remembered. Bishop informed Long and Lomax of the immediate potential of the project, at which time, he claimed, “the intensity of the project ratcheted up.” Lomax conducted interviews with tractor drivers who recalled picking cotton by hand in their youth, or men who had built the levees recalling working for white men on horseback who had one hand on the horse's reins and the other on a gun. They walked the tracks with railroad men, filming them straightening rails, laying ties, and singing so loudly that they failed to hear a train coming at them and barely were able to save the cables and cameras.

For most of August and the first week in September 1978, the trio made their way to towns such as Vicksburg, Bentonia, Bolton, Canton, Greenville, Hollandale, Independence, Lexington, Sardis, Senatobia, Como, and Arkabutla—each of which represented a potential shrine in the civil religion of blues. Bishop did not know much about the blues before coming to Mississippi. He filmed, pretty autonomously, and Long decided where to go and who to see. “By listening to the continual conversation between Worth and Alan as we drove endlessly through the delta and hill country,” Bishop explained, he “learned a lot” yet admitted he might as well “have been Alice dropped into the rabbit hole.” According to Bishop:

Alan was rhapsodic about the landform, the light, the atmospherics as we drove and drove. At one point speeding along with cotton feeds on both sides, Worth asked “what are we going to call this film?” and without thinking said “the land where the blues began”—and so it was called and Alan used the same title for his book.

897 Bishop, email to author, December 30, 2017.
899 While the trio did not work with a dedicated crew from MS-ETV, some shoots benefitted from their Field Recording Unit (FRU) truck and a second camera. MS-ETV camera operator Cliff Tobias travelled with them on occasion as a video engineer, and camera operator Ludwig Goon, of Greenville, shot that second camera. Goon also sometimes traveled with them and did a lot of shots while sharing the Ikegami with Bishop; see John Bishop, email to author, December 30, 2017.
Somewhat redolently working in the summer heat, the filmmakers rigged up lights to continue taping after dark, sweating profusely in the humid night air as large insects attacked the burning bulbs. If the setting was inside a dimly lit café or juke joint, Lomax set up large, overhead lights, which not only made the cinder block buildings feel more like an oven, but also gave rise to issues concerning the vision of Lomax. “I had some trouble with the cultural aesthetics of Lomax,” Long explained in one interview with Tom Dent. While one reviewer of the film later noticed the “subtle, but omniscient Lomaxian presence...from start to finish [which] laments the ‘disappearance’ of the folk culture that produced the blues [and] casts a decidedly romantic view of the Black Mississippian (and indirectly, Blacks at large),” she also asserted that the “intermittent Lomax narrative voice-overs” were overshadowed by the philosophical commentary and descriptive dialogue provided by the artists themselves. Long was concerned about the physical manipulation of the artists’ surroundings and the narrative framing of interviews and performances, and he set his mind to making his own mark on the film.

Indeed, he served as much more than a guide to the different homes of talented folk artists in the black community. Worth Long’s official credit on the documentary, which they did end up calling *The Land Where the Blues Began*, was co-director, along with Lomax and Bishop. Yet, he has not been acknowledged generally for the vital role he played in initiating the project or the extent of his influence on the finished product. He was almost entirely responsible for casting the people who appeared and performed in the documentary, and he was an active participant in the post-production process. “Worth came to Boston several times to help me

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edit,” Bishop recalled, He “was at Mississippi ETV during the revisions, and we spoke frequently on the phone.”

One reviewer argued that the combination of filming ongoing events and shooting interviews/performances proved a success as far as portraying rural African American artists with “dignity and stature.” It also conveyed “the sense of excitement that makes folk performers so important to their own communities.” Worth Long had no intention of ever allowing Lomax to make a film solely about a dying musical tradition. Rather, he worked tirelessly to ensure the film demonstrated that the blues was a way of life for many African Americans in the Delta.

Rather than being a physical place on a map, The Land Where the Blues Began was anywhere African Americans cast down their buckets, loved, toiled, bled, and struggled in hopes of achieving a piece of the American Dream.

Long acknowledged that the early blues guitarists exhibited great dexterity, which he attributed partly to the labors of agriculture, such as picking cotton. “The old guitar player had a mastery of his fingers that I am not directly attributing to picking cotton,” Long chortled, “but the picking of cotton would damn near help…it didn’t hurt.” The more solitary agricultural work of sharecroppers gave rise to the field hollers, which included the various freestyle forms of moans and shouts. Different from collective participation in work songs, hollers relied on the lone voice. The blues, therefore, emerged out of the songs of enslaved, agricultural workers and transformed through the individuals hollers of lumber and levee camp workers and

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902 John Bishop, email to author, December 30, 2017.
sharecroppers. 905 This is the main point Long was “really trying” to get across in The Land Where the Blues Began—that “the blues grew out of the work experience, the work and life experiences of black people.” Long emphasized the importance of black labor on the railroads, levee camps, and plantations, which transformed the southern landscape of the New South. 906

Some elements of the blues stemmed directly from the changing relationship and experiences of black folks with ecology, a concept which Worth Long admitted that he did not understand until he had come under the tutelage of Howard University professor and blues scholar Sterling Brown. “I didn’t have [it] in my head,” he declared, but Brown—as he had done with so many before—opened his eyes to the world of the levee camp workers, songs, and musicians. The multitude of interactions between human and non-human nature propelled the development of elements such as call-and-response, improvisation, and the infusion of blues notes from an African-inspired tonal system. 907 Ambitious planters used black labor to transform the region once filled with swamps and forests into fields of rich, alluvial soil that proved especially fertile for growing cotton. The labor of African Americans, moreover, was the basis of cotton production, and specific agricultural tasks—influenced by local context and special circumstances—defined the content and rhythm of the work songs. “Sugar cane,” as music scholar Ted Gioia notes, “demanded an aggressive, slashing attack to clear the fields,” but tobacco required significantly more delicate methods of cutting, spearing, and hanging. 908

picking of row cotton also required an organized, suitably-paced flow of work as well as the considerable use of the hands.

Worth Long conceived of blues musicians as “creating dangerously,” and he flat-out denied the argument of some scholars that “there was no protest element in the blues.”

Perhaps better than anyone, he realized that a person’s “creative work [was] a slow trek to discover, through the detours of art, those two or three images in whose presence his or her heart first opened.” His itinerant and loose, yet seemingly perpetual, efforts to engage the folk in dying rural communities was an attempt to learn and preserve important elements and traditions of what he believed was a vanishing way of life. It was no mere penchant or romantic fancy that drove his work. Neither was it reflective of his dissertation topic, as he has never written one.

He did not seek out and make the artists fit into a neat little box that did not undermine the current balance of power. He had little patience for wannabes and a largely unrecognized talent for identifying “gottabes.”

Long was not devoid of an agenda. Whether in the field or conducting a workshop of folklore, Long made it his mission to emphasize the thematic possibilities and variant interpretations of the blues, particularly the theme of resistance as perhaps its most crucial and important element. He maintained that protest traditions were “all inside, upside-down in the blues, and in the gospel.” Reverend Gary Davis, for example, demonstrated this protest tradition

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909 Edwidge Danticat, in her 2010 monograph on the immigrant artist, asserts that folklorists possess the ability to Create Dangerously through a sense of responsibility to people who open their hearts. We become citizens of a country, loosely connected and bound by values. Danticat writes that when the words of others catch us, we “fasten these images to some reality in our secret imagination or we...learn nothing rightly”; see, Edwidge Danticat, Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 18-20.


911 Ibid.
in Greenwich Village, performing, “If I Had My Way, I’d Burn This Building Down.” Blues singers often employed the practice of signifying, or infusing several layers of meaning on certain lyrical phrases. While signifying was used to address sexual themes considered lascivious in the repressive religious atmosphere of the Victorian era, it was also employed to address white oppression, obscuring a message of protest and providing a web of protection from retributive violence. Memphis Slim regarded the blues as a “kind of a revenge.” Under Jim Crow, he explained, there were certain “things we couldn’t say or do, so we sign it, I mean we sing…So it give him the blues.” Since the blues singer could not “‘speak his mind…he made a song of it, he sang it…he was signifying and getting his revenge through songs.” Worth Long also identified “signifying” as a method of protest in the blues:

I see the blues as an eminent example of protest tradition within African-American song style. It’s a question of how they felt they were able to express it, whether it was direct or indirect, hidden or just straight out…a lot of it was double entendre and hidden. When Jimmy Reid put out ‘Big Boss Man’—man, now, everybody wanted to hear that. They understood it. He didn’t have to say anything more. He’s just philosophic; ‘you ain’t big, you’re tall.’ So that’s a freedom song as far as I’m concerned, and it is of course blues.

Long’s emphasis on protest reflects his evolution as an activist in SNCC, but it also comes from, what literary critic Beverly Skinner calls, the “black and blues” ontology expressed in the ethnographic poetry of Sterling Brown. In the folk poem “Strong Men,” Brown employs the energizing devices of humor, blues, and proverbs to denounce the institutionalized nature of black suffering and celebrate the immeasurable contributions of black labor to the physical.

914 Quoted in Paul Garon, Blues and the Poetic Spirit (London: Eddison Press, 1975), 201.
economic, and cultural “upbuilding” of the United States. Skinner defines the phrase “black and blues” as a packed metaphor for the “physical and psychic abuse,” or “lived experience,” of African Americans that inspired an artistic response through the spirituals and the blues as well as a physical response in exhibitions of black nationalism and organized protest.\textsuperscript{916} It encompassed an overarching vision comprised of “black and blues” concepts of aesthetics that attached a “political, subversive, critical, and didactic” discourse to cultural expressions, including music and art. “Big Boss Man,” for example, builds upon an image of social, political, and economic oppression only to denounce the oppressor and continue to play the blues in triumph. The emotions that artists express during live performance as well as the lyrical content of the songs, Skinner asserts, paradoxically serve as a both a countervailing force against oppression and an energizing force for the oppressed, which reaffirms and anchors their humanity.

In all that he did with the blues, Worth Long emphasized its importance to understanding the experiences of African Americans. Although blues songs were influenced by spirituals, the latter were mostly defined by their religious nature, a combination of animism and Christian sacred traditions.\textsuperscript{917} Blues songs still maintained the solid West African influence—also present in spirituals—through call and response, improvisation, syncopation, polyphony, and the double meaning of words. Nevertheless, blues songs constituted one of the earliest secular musical forms created by African descendants on the American continent, work songs being the first. Another difference is that the soloist voice stands out in the blues, as opposed to choral singing,


distinctive of spirituals and work songs. According to Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), this feature embodies the acculturation of Africans in the New World, because the blues is an expressive manifestation of an individualized ethos that was alien to the slaves brought to the continent. Therefore, the blues ethos was not distinctive of Africans, but of African Americans, and was determined by their situation of exploitation in the Americas. Larry Neal defines it as: “the musical manifestation of one’s individual, cultural experiences in Afro-America with which members of the black community can identify.”918 This is what Worth Long saw in the extensive network of the Mississippi Action for Community Education (MACE), which was already taking action for community education and tackling the problems of the black communities in the Delta.

Displaced and jobless due to changing agricultural technologies, unsympathetic landowners and the unfulfilled promises of the federal government, a group of about forty desperate sharecroppers led by Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party leader Unita Blackwell decided to occupy the barracks on the decommissioned Greenville Air Force Base in the early morning hours of January 31, 1966. The lone security officer on duty ordered them to vacate the premises, but they refused to heed his commands. “We are here because we are hungry and cold and we have no jobs or land. We don’t want charity. We are willing to work for ourselves if given a chance,” explained a list of demands given the bewildered sentry. Since the base remained under military control, local officials delighted in the fact that the United States Air Force deployed eight airplanes carrying six high-ranking officers and over one hundred air policemen to remove the shivering band of nonviolent protesters. The overwhelming show of military strength convinced some of the demonstrators to leave in peace, but several militant squatters balked at the repeated pleas of the officers, who refused to remove the black protesters with white airmen. After flying in a group of black airmen, the force entered the buildings to initiate their physical removal. The protesters “fought, cursed, spat, and scratched at the enlisted

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men,” according to one local reporter, and eventually were either carried or dragged outside. Rev. Art Thomas, of the Delta Ministry, pointed out in a later press conference that the demonstrators “had considerable provocation” for their resistance, noting the air police’s “rough and profane” methods of dislodgment. Due to the forced evictions of women and children in the freezing cold, the military had to endure the same types of criticisms as local police in newspapers across the country, such as the New York Post, which issued an editorial indictment of the military’s unfeeling actions—an incident reflecting President Herbert Hoover’s forced removal of World War I veterans from their makeshift camps at Anacostia Flats, a muddy swamp across the Anacostia River from the governmental core of Washington D.C., during the early depths of the Great Depression.

In the nation’s capital, United States Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach believed that the “potentially explosive” situation surrounding the occupation of the Greenville Air Force base could lead to Mississippi becoming “the Selma, Alabama of 1966.” Considering that thousands of poor blacks had lost their jobs as well as their homes, the white community remained unwilling to “attempt to deal with the problem even at the welfare level,” and state officials continued to blocked and delay federal relief programs at every turn, he urged the president to “deal with this problem expeditiously and directly through surplus food distribution, crash employment programs, and as many poverty programs as we can fund.” The Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) subsequently released funds for “Operation Help,” a program promising to hire five hundred (mostly black) unemployed people to distribute surplus

922 DM Papers, Delta Ministry Reports, b142f7.
924 Dittmer, Local People, 367-368.
commodities to the poor, which state officials had blocked prior to the occupation. After six months, the program had provided food assistance and relief to five hundred thousand hungry people, but control remained firmly in the hands of whites, who hired only a handful of blacks, undermining one crucial aspect of the program—black employment. The failure of President Johnson’s administration to circumlocute white control on the state level, in essence, demonstrated that the federal government alone could not end the dependent plight of African Americans in Mississippi.

Private foundations also initiated good faith efforts to alleviate black unemployment in cooperation with the segregationist power structure. In 1967, the Ford Foundation awarded a $500,000 grant to the Mississippi Research and Development Center (MRDC), a division of the segregationist state government, to initiate a six-county human redevelopment project through the newly-established Delta Resources Development Cooperation (DRDC), which hoped to “fight the poverty problem” with a “four-pronged training program” designed to turn displaced farm workers into “productive tax-paying” citizens. The foundation awarded the grant on two conditions: 1) “that the training be real” and 2) that “blacks be involved in designing and administering it.” Agreeing to the conditions, the DRDC’s original conception of the program was breathtaking in its breadth, utilizing the experience of a host of federal agencies, the state government, private industries and foundations not only to attack poverty at its roots but also to attract new industries to the Delta. It also boasted some novel features, which differentiated it from other training programs. First, it included a bi-racial advisory board, and second, it stressed the importance of “on-the-job” experience, concentrating on actual work situations in metal

working, chemical plant operation, and horticulture. Third, it proposed to house an estimated one hundred families at the old Air Force base in Greenville for several weeks, while the head of the household received job training skills and other family members were instructed in money management, budgeting, healthcare planning, and family planning so that the whole family might work together with the “wage earner,” upon completion of his training. The DRDC program and its training program at the old Air Force base, according to DDT editor Hodding Carter III, was perhaps the last “hope for a productive life for thousands of human beings and for a healthy economy in the Delta.”

The household education initiative and bi-racial advisory elements, however, did not sit well with the administration of Governor John Bell Williams. In early 1968, the state legislature passed a resolution calling for an “objective study” into the programs of the MRDC that constituted a “backdoor legislative attack” on the DRDC. In one letter to the governor, Mississippi Sovereignty Commission director Erle Johnston Jr. contended that penalizing the MRDC for its involvement with the DRDC would cause the Ford Foundation to withdraw its funding and channel the money instead through the Mississippi Action for Community Education (MACE), an upstart community development group headquartered in Greenville. The foundation was determined to support the program one way or another, he argued, and he suggested the governor leave it alone to ensure its operation by the “responsible” white folks in Greenville. Unwilling to accept the presence of civil rights activists on the advisory council,

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930 Erle Johnston Jr., memorandum to John Bell Williams, Mar 14, 1968, MSC Files, SCR ID # 6-78-0-4-1-1-1.
however, the governor forced the DRDC to drop both elements in order to receive his approval for the “on-the-job training” program.\textsuperscript{931}

Even after ensuring the program relied on white trainers and advisors, the Williams administration launched vicious attacks on the politics of the program, calling it at worst a “Communist plot” and at best a socialist experiment.\textsuperscript{932} A host of activists expressed virulent opposition to the lack of black control over the program, and their criticisms influenced the stance of the Ford Foundation. After startup difficulties, expensive renovations, and other problems with equipment, the program failed to send more than a handful of trainees into the industrial sector during its initial year. “It became clear,” according to one executive at the Ford Foundation, “that no serious training was being provided and that the blacks who were supposed to be involved were being ignored.”\textsuperscript{933} Despite some late successes in placing trainees in good jobs, the DRDC had not fulfilled its initial promises concerning local people, and the foundation sounded the program’s death knell, cutting funding to the project and allowing it to dissolve in 1969.\textsuperscript{934}

The need for training programs and job opportunities, however, remained one of the most pressing concerns of community organizers as well as local people in the Delta. The leadership of the Delta Ministry (DM), for example, realized that the effectiveness of black politicians and voters depended in large part on the establishment of a firm economic base that proffered independence from white control. Lacking the resources and capital to establish its own vehicle for economic development, the DM provided financial assistance and other means of support to

\textsuperscript{931} “Williams Has Not Yet Approved Delta Project,” \textit{BDH}, Apr 12, 1968, p.17; “Will Fit Program to State’s Tastes,” \textit{LLC}, Apr 20, 1968, p.3.


\textsuperscript{933} Michael Sviridoff, “Nomination for the John W. Gardner Leadership Award,” letter to John Thomas, Bernard McDonald Papers, Mississippi Action for Community Education (MACE) -- Memoranda, Correspondence, 1979-1987, b11f5p4.

\textsuperscript{934} “DRDC Project Suffers Ford Funds ‘Cutback,’” \textit{DDT}, Apr 10, 1969, p.1.
the handicraft cooperatives of the Poor People’s Campaign as well as various incarnations of Freedomcrafts, which employed relatively few people and remained dependent on sympathetic northern markets.\textsuperscript{935} Harry J. Bowie, an Episcopalian priest from New Jersey, who remained in the South after volunteering during Freedom Summer and became the associate director of the DM, forecasted the bleak future of cooperatives, as markets increasingly dried up in the late 1960s. Though he tried to attract investors to start a nonprofit organization to finance small black-owned and operated business ventures, he failed to attract serious interest from evangelical and other charitable foundations. His failure was due in part to the large number of community action groups that existed statewide in the late 1960s, all of which competed over a very limited amount of financial resources. Such a structure ensured that only a few varied projects received the required level of funding, impeding more sustainable programs for economic development. The only way to solve the problem, Bowie realized, was to cooperate with rival activist groups and coordinate efforts to bring about better employment opportunities. At meetings with over a dozen groups and community organizers, Bowie emphasized the potential impetus of combining their efforts to promote economic development. He eventually persuaded representatives from thirteen other community organizations, including MACE, to come together with the DM and form a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation to “promote businesses and industries run substantially for and by blacks” in the Delta.\textsuperscript{936}

Incorporated in June 1969, the Delta Foundation (DF) loaned start-up funds to labor-intensive, for-profit businesses through its profit-holding company Delta Enterprises, which

\textsuperscript{935} Mark Newman, \textit{Divine Agitators: The Delta Ministry and Civil Rights in Mississippi} (Athens, GA: University of Georgia, 2004), 175.
\textsuperscript{936} The DF was made up of thirteen community organizations including MACE, the DM, the Delta Opportunities Corporation (DOC), Mary Holmes Junior College, the Community Education Extension Service (CEES), Star Incorporated, and the Mound Bayou Development Corporation (MBDC); see, Mark Newman, \textit{Divine Agitators}, 178; “Pants Plant Slated,” \textit{DDT}, Oct 7, 1970, p.1.
provided employment opportunities for displaced workers in the Delta. The Delta Foundation board of directors included DM director Owen Brooks and associate director Harry Bowie as well as MACE director Ed Brown and associate director Charles Bannerman, the last of whom served as its founding chairman. Known as “The Brain,”—an apt moniker for someone from the Northeast who did not know a bull from a cow, a soybean from a cotton plant, or a budget from a balance sheet when he first arrived—Bannerman also took hold of the reigns of MACE after Ed Brown left the state in 1972. His leadership of both MACE and the DF, indeed, proved particularly adept against such long, tough odds. Over the next several years, he helped build up both of them to unforeseen heights and oversaw businesses that employed nearly four hundred people and boasted a combined payroll of almost two million dollars. From 1972 until his death in 1986, MACE was awarded over thirty million dollars in private foundation grants.

The future leader of the MACE and the DF was the grandson of a Native American sharecropper named Edward Bannerman and his African American bride, Minnie Marshburn, both of Pender, North Carolina. His father, Jessie Lee Bannerman (b. Feb 20, 1913), worked on the farm until the death of his father in the summer of 1935, after which John Lee decided to try out life in the urban sprawl of the Northeast. Similar to many other African Americans during the first half of the twentieth century, he believed that the future looked bleak in the South and moved to New York City, where he found work holding the doors at theatres. He met Flossie Roberts and married her in 1937, a union which produced three children over the next

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940 1920 US Census, Holly, Pender, North Carolina; Roll: T625_1313; Page: 11B; Enumeration District:75; Image: 452.
seven years. Like his father, who served in World War I, Jessie Lee served his country in the Navy during World War II.\textsuperscript{941} Determined to have his son, Charles Donald Bannerman, be the first in his family to attend college, John Lee took out a special life insurance policy to cover his tuition. Though his father passed away before he could finish college, according to one close friend, “his father’s belief in education and commitment to college had taken root.”\textsuperscript{942}

The future president of the Delta Foundation entered and won a competition to attend a public school for gifted young men in the Bronx called DeWitt Clinton High School. Though several of his friends and associates dropped out of high school in the late 1950s, preferring to engage in activities that landed them either in prison or the morgue, Bannerman studied hard, worked to pay for his books, took lessons on the cello, and joined the fencing team. He won a Regents scholarship to attend a local college, but, having never been any farther west than New Jersey, he decided to get away from the Empire State and set his sights on Ohio State University. With no financial aid, Bannerman had to work several jobs to cover his tuition. He lacked the funds for a few odd semesters, and he fell behind some of his contemporaries in attaining his bachelor’s degree. He was so broke one semester, in fact, that he slept in a lounge inside the student union. It was a challenging time in his life, but he received a quality education at OSU.\textsuperscript{943} Much like Tom Levin of the CDGM, Bannerman’s firsthand experience with poverty left an imprint on him and influenced his later decisions to head up efforts to alleviate the plight of the poor.

\textsuperscript{942} Michael Sviridoff, “Nomination for the John W. Gardner Leadership Award,” 1.
\textsuperscript{943} Ibid.
Bannerman received his bachelor’s degree in 1965, and he decided to remain in Columbus, where he gained vital experience that further shaped his future commitments to the poor. He wanted to do something to help people, so he went to work as a caseworker at the county welfare office. Over the next eighteen months, he developed a special program to assist his most troubled client families, and he organized his co-workers into the Local 1478 of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). While serving as its first president, the group also founded Franklin County Credit Union.\textsuperscript{944}

One of his most important work experiences in Columbus, however, was as a volunteer for a community development organization called the East Central Citizens Organization (ECCO), which a few local African Americans organized “to help people help themselves and demonstrate that poverty can be overcome.”\textsuperscript{945} Pastor Leopold Bernhard, an anti-Nazi refugee from Germany in 1938, co-founded the ECCO in a blighted area with a thirty percent unemployment rate and thirty-eight percent of the residents living on public welfare. He came to stand with Milton Kolter, a bright and voluble young economist who gave him the idea of a community organization, and Laverne Love, the executive director of ECCO. In the initial years of its existence, ECCO had not quite created a utopia, but, as Kolter explains in his narrative history of the ECCO, it had become a local service provider in a neighborhood of 6,500 residents with high unemployment rates. He also shows the bottom-up approach that participants used in deciding to legally incorporate the neighborhood, vesting legislative power in an assembly and electing an executive council to carry out general administration duties. The neighborhood corporation consisted of four districts, each of which organized a political action group to initiate discussions, develop solutions, and initiate programs towards that end. In its first three years,

\textsuperscript{944} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{945} Ibid.
ECCO opened a public health service program and a veterinary clinic, purchased several houses for rehabilitation, started a credit union, and opened a community supermarket.

Beyond providing necessary services to local people, the ECCO wanted to have “territorial jurisdiction” over all “public activities,” and its leaders wanted control of federal anti-poverty programs as well as youth programs in the neighborhood. By obtaining jurisdiction over the local library, appointing the librarian, and selecting the books on the shelves, the ECCO hoped to one day become a legal entity of the municipal government. Milton Kotler lauded the ECCO for its “liberation of practical political deliberation.” “For the first time,” he wrote,

residents legally decide certain matters of community life. They are steadily practicing the art of political decision-making and living with and learning from the consequences of their decisions. ECCO residents are now orators and officials, and practical political wisdom is developing in a community where earlier the only expressions were frustration and escape.

The group fostered the type of political freedom that philosopher Hannah Arendt defined not as self-determination or civil liberty, but as “something that appears in the interaction of plural beings.” According to the initial director Clifford Tyree, the ECCO’s most important achievement was to show folks the importance of “self-conceived ideas and attitudes.”

The ECCO served as an early model for community action agencies. The United Auto Workers Union, used the model to establish some of the first organizations to center their efforts on economic justice. In his original endorsement of the War on Poverty, union president Walter

947 Ibid., 48.
948 Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 211.
Reuther told U.S. President Lyndon Johnson, “We enlist with you for the duration in the war against poverty…and pledge our full support and cooperation.” Though Reuther was not satisfied with the anti-poverty programs of the Johnson administration, because they did not address income inequality, the UAW nevertheless believed the War on Poverty offered an “opportunity in which long-standing policies and practices were open to question and change.” The best way to “create change,” Reuther reasoned, was “by building community organizations.”

Bannerman’s experience and ingenuity soon caught the attention of the Citizen’s Crusade Against Poverty (CCAP), the forerunner of the Center for Community Change, which hired him as director of technical assistance. While one of his first tasks was to conduct research for the National Inquiry on Hunger, which the Columbia Broadcasting System used to substantiate its findings in the documentary, *Hunger in America*, he spent much more of his time learning all that he could about existing federal loan and grant programs. He was also co-editor of a CCAP training manual, *Everyman’s Guide to Federal Programs.* As he learned how to conceptualize, develop, fund and operate training programs for community organizers, he dreamed of working with Cesar Chavez, who headed up the National Farmworkers Union. More specifically, Bannerman wanted to emulate the community building projects initiated by Ted Watkins, of the Watts Labor Community Action Council (WLCAC).

Union and community activists in Los Angeles, California created the WLCAC after experiencing much civil unrest in 1965. The increasingly assertive group, acting under the leadership of Watkins, received grants from the federal and state governments and from private

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951 Michael Sviridoff, “Nomination for the John W. Gardner Leadership Award,” 2.
foundations. He formed a credit union, provided consumer services, built low-income housing, and established farms, stores, and community centers. The organization also provided job training and recreational programs for young people, developed eleven small parks, and planted more than 20,000 trees. Influenced by cultural nationalists, the WLCAC also promoted black culture, supported a writers’ workshop, and staged the Watts Summer Festival.  

In late 1967, the CCAP offered Bannerman an opportunity to provide technical expertise and support for its leadership training programs. He had to choose between moving to Newark, New Jersey and moving to the Mississippi Delta. He rode a train over to New Jersey, and, after looking around at the immense scale of urban decay, he almost made up his mind to take the position in Mississippi sight unseen. His decision to head South, however, derived in part from interactions with civil rights leaders from the Magnolia State. During one of her visits to the nation’s capital, for example, Unita Blackwell made quite an impression on Bannerman with her passionate belief in the “great potential” of black folks in the Delta. He set his mind to finding that “wealth of talent” and making the most of this “great opportunity to build something new.”

The “handsome, self-confident, workaholic” came to Tougaloo College and worked with the Friends of SNCC. In his multi-faceted role, he organized and conducted voter registration drives and taught courses in bookkeeping. “I’d read a chapter in an accounting textbook one night,” explained the former political science major, “and then conduct a class on it the next

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953 Unita Blackwell declared in one interview, “Charles [Bannerman], I went and got him. So I am the person that hired Charles [Bannerman] to come down.”

Bannerman expected to return to the Northeast at the end of a year. “Like most Northerners, I spent my life rejecting my Southern roots, and when I first came South, I had the typical New York arrogance. I soon learned, however, that the people were warm and friendly. If anyone was ignorant it was I.” He carried a carton of books with him to Mississippi, believing that reading would keep him busy in his spare time. He never unpacked them.

He left the state capital and moved to the “dirt poor counties” of the mid-Delta. In his first days as the associate director of MACE, Bannerman had an encounter with a plantation worker that years later he recalled as indicative of the challenges he would face over the years. After Bannerman explained the impetus of voter registration, the farmhand had a simple query. “When the man throws me off his place for registering to vote,” he asked, “are y’all going to give me a job and a house?” Bannerman recalled how the eviction of hundreds of African Americans living on plantations posed a serious problem for union members from several surrounding counties. The Delta Ministry and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party had supported the failed strike of the farmer’s union, which left scores of tenant farmers and their families homeless and unemployed. Not all of them could live at Freedom Village, and the people who did end up living in the rural community experienced serious hardships.

Bannerman’s initial duties at MACE included coordinating training programs for community development workers in fourteen counties, and he personally setup five county development programs, which consisted of organizing social services and economic

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957 Michael Sviridoff, “Nomination for the John W. Gardner Leadership Award,” letter to John Thomas, Bernard McDonald Papers, Mississippi Action for Community Education (MACE) -- Memoranda, Correspondence, 1979-1987, b11f5p3.
958 Ibid.
development programs. Bannerman, in addition, served as director of the Superette Development Program, making him responsible for coordination and development, financing and management of five supermarkets with a sales volume potential of two million dollars.\footnote{Lois Steward, “Bannerman Receives Manufacturing Award,” The Voice (Feb 1978): 2.}

At one time,” Emma Cooper Harris explained, “we had supermarkets all across the Delta, all of them were community education supermarkets,” which meant the proprietors also offered to teach folks about managing money. They owned and operated each of the community stores, many of them called Community Pride Supermarket.\footnote{The first supermarket was established in Bolivar County in 1971. Two more supermarkets were setup in Madison and Holmes County in the mid-1970s; see, Emma Cooper Harris, interview by T. DeWayne Moore, June 6, 2013, Anguilla, Mississippi.}

In late 1969, MACE and thirteen other organization pooled their resources and started the Delta Foundation, an initiative that sounded perfect for the man known as “The Brain.”

Since all previous efforts “made by the people in the Greenville area to improve their economic well-being seemed destined to only deepen their despair,” as one student of local labor organizing noticed, one of the first endeavors of the board of directors was to conduct a study of the reasons behind all of the previous failures. The study concluded that the crafts cooperatives, self-help housing programs, job training ventures, and concentrated employment programs had all been “too ambitious and too unrealistic, as well as lacking in both the professional management and technical skills needed to start them.”\footnote{“Fines Vines,” Uplift: What People Themselves Can Do (Salt Lake City, UT: Olympus, 1974), 30.}

As one of its first decisions, therefore, the board procured the services of Herbert Groce, the black deputy director of the DRDC’s soon-to-be-defunct training program, whose prior managerial experience had proved crucial to its late success. Groce resigned his post at the DRDC to “explore other options” in January 1970, and he soon accepted an offer to serve as the first executive director of the Delta Foundation.\footnote{“Manpower Training Executive Resigns,” DDT, Jan 7, 1970, p.1.}
In addition to acquiring the administrative expertise of Groce, the Delta Foundation received crucial assistance in cultivating its needs for professional management due to the chance encounter between MACE director Ed Brown and successful Indiana businessman J. Irwin Miller, who once served as president of the National Council of Churches and encouraged the ecumenical group to support the black freedom struggle. The Miller-led Cummins Engine Company loaned a couple of experienced executives to the Delta Foundation and helped organize its profit-holding company Delta Enterprises. Jim Joseph was one of the executives loaned to the foundation in its early years, and he recalled several reasons the company made such a commitment to Delta Foundation. “We were influenced by the impoverishment of the area,” he informed, “the strong sense of self-determination among its people, and the persuasiveness of Ed Brown and Charles Bannerman and their sound plans.” Since the “only thing they lacked were strong management skills,” the progressive-minded Miller set up a management advisory team to offer administrative assistance to the foundation.963

The Delta Foundation received the majority of its funds through grants and loans from federal government agencies, but it also received contributions from the Ford Foundation and religious groups. In March 1970, Groce submitted a proposal for a “planning grant” to the OEO and received $88,100 the following month to research viable economic development opportunities in the Delta. Embracing a much more methodical approach to selecting a new project, the foundation and its advisors drafted a list of seven principles to guide them in determining the nature of the future enterprise.

1. The social priorities (providing employment for the poor) have to be compatible with its economic objectives (operating a for-profit operation)

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2. It had to rely on low-skill-level employees
3. It should employ as many people as possible and provide them all with training in skills and management
4. It required a low capital investment per employee
5. The product of the business should be exported and avoid local competition
6. It required steady access to raw materials
7. It should allow for a quick turnover in capital so the business can expand without heavy refinancing

Unlike the failed black businesses of the late 1960s, the Delta Foundation promoted a brand of minority business that put “business before blackness.” It emphasized the importance of strategic planning and the achievement of realistic goals. The Delta Foundation, from the beginning, reconciled its social and economic imperatives, according to board chairman Charles Bannerman. “We didn’t see mixing our social concerns with business strategy,” he asserted, “We felt that a business that employed a lot of people accomplished our social purpose.”

Bannerman was also critical of projects that he said often appeared to be “designed for planned bankruptcy,” such as the Delta Food Processing Corporation (DFPC), which he considered a “boondoggle” from the start. Financed by the Economic Development Administration, the bankrupt venture was so over-equipped that its sole plant had the capacity to process “all the field peas grown in the United States.”

Project counselor Vance Nimrod, who accepted the position of assistant executive director of the Delta Foundation, plainly summarized the initial mission of the foundation, “We have to establish a business that can at least break even.”

After applying its criteria, the board developed a list of potential ventures that included a food processing plant, manufacturing plants that produced light switches and wire harnesses, woodworking operations that fashioned wire spools, tool handles, and furniture frames, and a...
garment factory. It decided, after subsequent screening and serious deliberation, to establish a plant that would produce blue jeans and sell them to a wholesaler as opposed to retail outlets. “Jeans seemed realistic,” recalled Nimrod, who, along with Groce, incorporated Fine Vines in October 1970. The corporation’s name derived from a slang term meaning good clothes. “If one street dude tells another he’s got ‘fine vines,’” one journalist explained, “he means he likes his clothes; they’re sharp, you dig?” The Delta Foundation chose a symbolic location for its first economic enterprise and leased a building at the old Air Force base in Greenville.

Having made the decision to establish a blue jeans manufacturing firm, the Delta Foundation drafted a business prospectus and embarked on a search for funds. Planning to initially hire about fifty workers, mostly women, and ultimately employ one hundred people to fulfill its numerous contracts with wholesalers to produce jeans and other styles of pants, the Delta Foundation secured a loan of $346,000 from the First National Bank of Greenville—the largest commercial loan ever granted at the time to a black-operated enterprise by a bank in Mississippi. “We were very impressed with the low-profile, business-like approach of the organization,” the bank’s senior vice president declared, “They presented us with a well-prepared loan request [and] we were only too happy to oblige.” The OEO followed up with a $1.2 million dollar grant to the Delta Foundation to create jobs for poor folks and “build an economic base” in Bolivar, Holmes, Humphreys, Issaquena, Leflore, Madison, Panola, Quitman, Sharkey,

968 Ibid., 31.
970 The city council allowed Fine Vines to lease the property at four cents per square foot per month for six years; see, “Pants Plant Slated,” DDT, Oct 7, 1970, p.1.
Sunflower, Tallahatchie, Tunica, Washington, and Yazoo counties. In addition to the large infusion of federal dollars, the Delta Foundation received smaller grants from the Ford Foundation and the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO), as well as the technical consulting services of the Irwin Miller foundation in Indiana, which guided the foundation through the complex task of setting up a production plant at the former air base, acquiring equipment and raw materials, hiring enough qualified local people, and putting it into operation.

Beginning in December, the operation of Fine Vines from the barracks of the deactivated Air Force base was off and running smoothly for the most part, and the plant increased its workforce from fifteen to sixty local women in its first year. "We had one customer when we started," explains Bannerman, "who contracted us for all the jeans we could make." When that blue jeans wholesaler cancelled its contract, Fine Vines found itself saddled with $35,000 worth of jeans and no place to sell them. The seemingly disastrous situation also impelled executive director Herb Groce to leave in July 1971 for a more secure position at a medical and dentistry college in North Carolina. Facing a serious dilemma, Delta Foundation board chairman Charles Bannerman explained their options, “We could stop production, lay off the workforce, and look for new outlets for the products [or] we could continue production and hope to market

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974 According to the proposal, and once the businesses were profitable, the workers and residents of the area served by the plant had the first opportunity to purchase eighty percent of the stock; the other twenty percent of the holdings in the businesses remained with the DF; see, “DF to Get US Funds,” DDT, July 2, 1970, p.8.
the product ourselves.” Stuck with so much product, Bannerman recalled, “we borrowed money from the Foundation, ceased production and everyone in the organization went out and sold jeans. I’d go to New York for a meeting and afterward, I’d visit stores and try to sell our jeans.” Fine Vines sold their entire stock and made a $15,000 profit in four months. Considering that shutting down would have caused a loss of jobs as well as confidence in the foundation, the Delta Foundation decided to establish its own marketing firm called the Delta Sales Corporation (DSC), which proved critical to the development of sales to retail stores.

Fine Vines was not “any kind of general training program,” declared Vance Nimrod, and it was “not in business to employ the handicapped, or anything like that,” but its unskilled workers and inexperienced managers seriously hindered production in the beginning. The dearth of skilled workers led to an “astronomical” turnover rate. Since most of the workforce—largely unemployed farm workers who possessed no industrial skills—required a significant amount of training, the plant’s production numbers fell short of expectations in the first couple of years. “For a lot of people, this is their first job,” explained Bob Tewes, former Cummins executive and general manager of Delta Enterprises; they were “bringing people in off the street [and] having them go through a training program to increase their skills.” Fine Vines originally planned to manufacture two hundred pairs of jeans each day, but it produced only about three hundred pairs a week during its first year. The company, moreover, found it difficult to control the quality of production, because inexperienced inspectors often hesitated to report the unsatisfactory work of their friends and neighbors.

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981 Ibid.
The presence of white organizers for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union (ACWU), who persuaded workers to petition the National Labor Relations Board for a union election, also put the foundation in a difficult position in the early years. Despite hoping not to mix business with politics, the foundation risked tarnishing its public image and reputation by opposing the union. Yet, it could hardly afford to pay higher wages and provide better fringe benefits to workers at a time when Fine Vines operated at an estimated monthly deficit of $25,000. Arguing that the blues jeans manufacturer had been created to provide training and jobs for disadvantaged people, not maximize profits, the board of directors voted to oppose unionization. Many of the foundation officials and managers, moreover, resented the invasion of white union organizers, who, in their view, did not care about the general welfare of blacks, disrupted operations at the plant, and told them how to run their business. Other foundation leaders especially sympathetic to the needs of the poor supported the union, which created a split in its managerial ranks and led to the resignation of one manager, who denounced Fine Vines as a “business for business” venture. The workers ultimately voted in favor of union representation in July 1972, but, according to one foundation investigator, little friction existed between black officials and the union. Most of its employees, however, continued to pay union dues into the new decade.983

Hodding Carter III, in one editorial, noticed that an air of professionalism had “permeated almost everything” that contributed to the successes of the Delta Foundation. The group had produced positive results despite a severe lack of local publicity—operating under the radar in much the same way as MACE in the beginning. “In fact,” as Hodding Carter III noticed, “Delta Foundation’s profile has been so low as to be almost non-existent, a fact which has caused more

983 Ibid.
than one *Delta Democrat-Times* reporter to beat his head against the wall in baffled frustration."984 While some economic development firms had been long on predictions and offered little in terms of results, Delta Foundation made hardly any public claims at all while working to produce “hard, concrete signs of progress,” not the least being the hard-won economic stability of Fine Vines, which employed in upwards of one hundred people, expanded operations several times and managed to break even in 1973. The foundation’s leaders and board of directors—largely representatives of organizations with roots in community activism—made no bones about their passionate commitment to social change, but they also realized that in capitalist society, the development of real economic power was not achieved by rhetoric but hard work. The product of the Delta Foundation’s hard work was a host of viable enterprises owned by the very people who had been the lowest-paid employees of firms owned by the traditional white power structure.985

The initial success of Fine Vines substantiated the foundation’s strategies of providing capital to businesses that ordinarily had trouble getting loans yet had a reasonable chance of becoming profitable and self-sustaining. The Delta Foundation made a sustained commitment to economic development and reinvested profits in new businesses and other community projects, reflecting one of the founding goals of the Delta Ministry, which lost most of its financial backing in 1971. Though the DM continued its stoic campaigns long after most other civil rights organizations had left the state, and in some cases, fallen apart, some historians maintain that the DM’s arrival in 1964 proved too late to benefit from an association with the civil rights movement.986 In addition to facing the full force of white resistance, which often perceived the

985 Ibid.
organization as being in collusion with black militants, the DM’s twenty-seven “energetic, aggressive lay and clerical staff members” made an unflinching commitment to poor blacks in Mississippi, which tended to pit them against other community action groups as opposed to reconciling differences and forming a united front. DM director Owen Brooks, for example, maintained a contemptuous relationship with MACE, according to longtime MACE organizer Emma Cooper Harris, who insisted the two groups “stayed at odds with each other.” The DM, she argued, “only got together” with other groups on occasion, such as their collaborative efforts on the board of the Delta Foundation. Though the Ministry’s shining achievement was attracting federal funds to the state to support Head Start programs, most of its other ventures ended in failure. Historian Mark Newman attributes the DM’s lack of success partly to its failure to garner support in the black communities of the Delta, which were “riven by factionalism, fear, and apathy.”

It was clear to Owen Brooks in the early seventies that without sustainable projects on the local level, as well as a massive influx of federal and private financial resources, it would be hard to advance the goal of genuine racial equality. Due to the lack of funds from member denominations, a shrinking membership, and the group’s declining commitment to social activism, the National Council of Churches made severe cuts in its staff and program budgets, and it had no choice but to slash the budget of the DM in the spring of 1971. Reducing its staff to four people, the DM abandoned all local projects and decided to act more as a provider of technical support in the areas of economic development, politics, education, and welfare. The

988 Emma Cooper Harris, interview by T. DeWayne Moore, June 6, 2013, Anguilla, Mississippi.
DM continued to make an impact, however, even in its diminished capacity, securing grants that rebuilt the dilapidated infrastructures in the cities of Bolton, Mound Bayou, and Mayersville. Largely a one-man operation throughout the mid-1970s, the DM also provided crucial political support to state representative Robert Clark, of Holmes County. Owen Brooks remained a vocal advocate for the poor and an outspoken critic of Bannerman.\textsuperscript{990}

The leaders of MACE and the DM continued to work together on the board of the Delta Foundation, which experienced significant growth in its early years despite a few setbacks. In early October 1971, the Delta Foundation acquired its second operation, Mid-South Metal Stamping, which manufactured stamped metal parts to the specifications of industrial clients, for $150,000.\textsuperscript{991} The foundation relocated the operation to Sardis, Mississippi, a small town about fifty miles south of Memphis in Panola County, where it hoped to employ as many as fifty people by 1973.\textsuperscript{992} Though it incurred significant losses in the beginning, mainly because existing markets were drying up and the factory used out-of-date equipment. Still, Bannerman believed in the viability of the firm, and he brought in new management with an extensive background in metal parts manufacturing to reverse the decline.\textsuperscript{993} The losses of Mid-South soon began to shrink, which allowed the company to purchase new equipment and increase its efficiency. Through patience, arduous work, and sound management, Mid-South survived its initial problems, expanded operations, and turned into a major moneymaking venture in the late 1970s.\textsuperscript{994}

\textsuperscript{990} Ibid., 224-225.
\textsuperscript{991} DDT, Oct 12, 1971, p.9.
\textsuperscript{993} Immediately before joining Mid-South, John Patterson had been vice president of a metal stamping company that had annual sales of $12 million.
In 1974, Mid-South acquired the Delta Fan Company of Jackson, Mississippi, a manufacturer of residential and commercial exhaust fans, and it also purchased Century of Memphis, Inc., a manufacturer of folding attic staircases for clients such as K-Mart, Montgomery Ward and J.C. Penney. Since the company already produced metal hardware for folding staircases, the acquisitions were natural extensions of its operations. By dividing the operation into three firms—Delta Fans, Century of Memphis, and Mid-South Metal Stamping—Delta Enterprises eventually boasted gross annual sales in excess of $2.8 million and employed more than one hundred people. The three divisions consequently experienced a concomitant rise in sales, because Delta Fans and Century purchased a large majority of the assorted metal hardware produced at the Sardis plant. Mid-South’s most profitable division indeed was the Delta Fan Company. Electric fans made a comeback in the seventies due to the renewed thrust towards energy conservation. By offering an effective cooling system that used less energy than air conditioners, the company reaped serious profits from the growing demand for its large fans and heat exhaust units.995

In the fall of 1974, Delta Enterprises purchased a product line from Hathaway Instruments and established its third operation, a manufacturer of electronic parts called Electro Controls, Inc. (ECI).996 Based in Canton, a small city in Madison County just north of the state capital, ECI manufactured pressure switches, relays, current sensors and dri-reed switches for the aircraft and computer industries. The foundation’s board of directors believed that electronics was a growth industry, and it procured the product line because, unlike many electronic products, the ECI switches were relatively easy to put together, which allowed for the in-plant training of new employees. The company had sales representatives in cities across the United States and

996 “Charters,” *DDT*, Nov 14, 1974, p.34.
Europe, who secured contracts from major aircraft instrument companies and with RCA, Westinghouse, and Chevrolet. Originally capitalized at $850,000, ECI employed sixty people and boasted an annual gross income of $600,000 in the late 1970s.

The Delta Foundation established its venture capital division, the Delta Development and Management Corporation (DDMC), which provided loans to businesses that lacked access to traditional sources of capital, in 1973. In its initial seven months, the new division provided financial assistance to thirteen minority business ventures, one of which leased eighteen hundred feet of warehouse space at the old Air Force base to assemble health and beauty aids. While the majority of its funds went to small businesses such as gas stations and grocery stores, it also provided loans to larger operations. One of its particularly significant beneficiaries was the black-owned Interchange Communications, Inc., a Greenville-based corporation certified to “operate radio stations,” which received an initial loan of $30,000 to establish WBAD (FM) in Leland. William D. Jackson, president of Interchange Communications, had labored in the broadcast industry for more than two decades. In the early 1970s, he was a popular disc jockey on a white-owned station, which featured programming geared towards a black audience. When the station’s owners decided to sell the station in 1973, Jackson and his partners requested financial backing from the Delta Foundation to establish a black-owned and operated radio station. Since it had proven a profitable business venture and held the potential to serve as a potent forum for publicizing the voices, thoughts, and activities of the black community, the DF decided to fund the promising venture. The radio station started off with lackluster broadcast...
facilities—a small cinderblock building sitting in a field far off the highway. WBAD made up for its less-than-imposing physical presence with an amplified message reflecting the development of black economic and political power, which resonated deeply with many of the poor, black folks of the Delta.1001

In the early morning hours of December 24, 1973, the 3,000 watt station WBAD-FM went on the air.1002 It was powerful enough to reach Rolling Fork to the south, Cleveland to the north, Greenwood to the east, and an estimated forty miles into Arkansas, as well as a small area in northeast Louisiana. William Jackson, having grown up in Greenville and developed a love of music under the tutelage of prominent local bandleader Winchester Davis, possessed a unique understanding of local musical tastes, and he initiated a program of soul music during the day and a “mixture of soul, rock, jazz and blues at night.”1003 Touting itself as “the hottest radio station in town,” WBAD quickly garnered the highest listener rating of the area’s six stations with its “big city sophisticated sound,” and its slogan of “Soul, Blues, Jazz and Rock for everybody!”1004

The station’s initial five disc jockeys lit up the dial at 94.3 FM from 5 a.m. to midnight. Operating nineteen hours a day “to serve the community” for “approximately fifty miles,” WBAD devoted sixteen minutes an hour to advertisements and twenty minutes to public service.1005 It hired two news reporters to provide coverage of local and statewide news, and it featured an hourly news program from a “national news organization” called the Independent Black Network. Being the only station in Greenville “with any kind of black ownership,”

WBAD played music that appealed to a “diverse listening audience,” yet included “many community-oriented and community interest programs” geared towards the black community.\textsuperscript{1006} The unique programming on the station proved a successful business venture as well as a popular media outlet among all folks in the Delta. In August 1974, when the station transitioned to a twenty-four hour format, Jackson beamishly told one local journalist, “I don’t think there’s anybody in town that competes with us.”\textsuperscript{1007}

Competition, however, was not the central problem of the Delta Foundation in the early 1970s. Rather, as its holding company Delta Enterprises expanded operations and acquired more plants, the board realized the indispensable value of experienced management with the skills to maximize efficiency and steer the business through a recession. WBAD quickly developed a large group of listeners due to the marketing strategies and promotions of manager William Jackson. It’s one of the rare success stories of a local manager doing well in the DF. The firms setup under Delta Enterprises had promoted some local workers too soon. While the inexperienced managers certainly possessed a strong work ethic, almost all of them lacked important managerial skills that worked against the foundation’s economic goals.\textsuperscript{1008} Fine Vines, for example, found itself in trouble once again during the economic downturn of 1974-75, when its biggest customer cancelled all of its orders. Forced to stop production, the blue jeans manufacturer had to lay off many of its workers for four months. “We hated to let people go, but if we hadn’t,” Bannerman admitted, “we would have gone bankrupt.”\textsuperscript{1009} Though Fine Vines laid off forty-three out of a total of seventy-two employees over the winter, it recalled twenty-

\textsuperscript{1008} “Delta Enterprises: The Rural Route To Corporate Profits,” \textit{Black Enterprise} (June 1978), 105-117.
\textsuperscript{1009} Diane Weathers, “Delta Enterprises: The Rural Route to Corporate Profits,” \textit{Black Enterprise} (June 1978), 111.
one of them in March 1975.\textsuperscript{1010} Harry Bowie, one of the remaining staff members of the DM, had warned minority business leaders that the “mean and lean days” ahead left no room for anyone who believed “that the world owed [them] a debt.” There simply was no “sympathy market” in the business world, especially during a recession. In order to survive DE had to prove it would truly put “business before blackness.”

In the spring of 1975, DE demoted Clarence Antoine, the longtime leader at Fine Vines, and hired an experienced white veteran of the clothing industry, Julian Kipnis, as his superior, which ended the initial period of all-black management. Antoine “was one of the nicest fellas you ever want to meet, a very quiet-mannered fella [who] kept things within himself,” according to DM associate and MVSU professor Robert Young. His subordinate status to a white manager, however, created “some friction that built up over a period of time.” It was not long until “he had taken all he could take,” kept his frustration bottled up, and had to release it.\textsuperscript{1011} In an affidavit filed in U.S. District Court, Antoine stated that Fine Vines plant manager Julian Kipnis as well as the vice-president Robert Tewes came to his office around three o’clock on August 20, 1975. “I informed them that I was resigning my position at Fine Vines,” he stated, “because of certain problems that had developed since the arrival of Kipnis.” As the three men sat in the office “discussing matters,” Antoine pulled open his desk drawer, which contained a gun. “Upon seeing the pistol,” he declared, “I just picked it up and fired randomly in order to relieve myself of the pressures, frustrations and anxieties that I had been exposed to as the result of certain

problems.” Antoine ended up shooting Kipnis in the neck, but the small .22-caliber bullet hit no major arteries.

Facing attempted murder charges as well as a civil suit requesting damages in upwards of $416,000, Antoine received the support of black folks who sympathized with his situation. According to Robert Young, some people thought Charles Bannerman should “intervene” on his behalf. The facts and evidence of the case, however, left “no reasonable conclusion other than Antoine called Kipnis into the office to shoot him.” Antoine’s claim that he did not fire “at anybody in particular” was so ludicrous, in fact, that “no reasonable jury could accept it.” A rumor spread, nevertheless, in some circles that Bannerman “wouldn’t lift a finger” to help his longtime employee, suggesting that some folks blamed the whole affair on the demotion and recent practice of hiring more experienced, and white, managers.

Like a lot of newcomers to the business world, the Delta Foundation experienced some growing pains along the way. “I figured that if we had money and a market, we could make it,” Bannerman explained, but “I know now that money isn’t the answer—it’s management.” While DE, at one time, hired a local, all-black management team, Bannerman learned that such policies were bad business decisions, and, rather quickly, he developed an “interest in skills and talents rather than race.” The same policy was the focus of one article in Ebony magazine that highlighted the “vast economic self-help program” of the Nation of Islam. “There is nothing fatalistic about Muhammad’s brand of Islam when it comes to getting things done,” the author asserted, “Putting his money where his mouth is, the Messenger has masterminded the acquisition of a multi-million dollar, nationwide business and farming complex at a dizzying clip.

that has seasoned businessmen and economists in wide-eyed disbelief.” In addition to farm operations in Michigan, Georgia, and Alabama, the Nation also renovated a former factory building into the *Muhammad Speaks* Building in Chicago, which housed its newspaper as well as a meat processing plant. Staffing its business with Muslim and non-Muslim workers, including a few whites, the organization emphasized business rather than race and religion. “If we can’t find a qualified brother for a particular job,” Muhammad admitted, “we hire a white man until we have been able to train a brother to take over.” In fact, he went on to gleefully reveal that “quite a few white devils are helping us.”

Bannerman, in fact, ended up hiring an all-white management team with years of experience to run all of the factories operating under DE. Fine Vines’ cost-conscious general manager Sam Moncure, a toussle-haired native of Florence, Alabama with fifteen years of management experience in apparel manufacturing, was optimistic about the future in reporting an estimated gross income of three million dollars in 1977. He admitted that he was not a liberal, but he made a commitment to ensure the profitability of the plant continued to provide employment for over one hundred workers. While uninterested in the “social implications” of Fine Vines, he maintained that efficient business practices would ultimately lead to the expansion as well as creation of perhaps one hundred jobs, most of which would go to African Americans. Fine Vines improved its production level to 850 dozen pairs of jeans per week and implemented drastic controls on quality, which allowed it to fulfill contracts to supply major retailers with blue jeans in the mid-1970s. Delta Sales Corporation eventually built up a yearly sales volume in excess of one million dollars to retailers in several product lines. Fine Vines also

1016 Ibid.
established a stronger relationship with the J.C. Penney Company, which sold Fine Vines jeans under its own label. In addition to producing hundreds of pairs of jeans each week for the DSC, the plant also manufactured four hundred dozen pair of jeans each week for J.C. Penney, a contract that soon rose to one thousand pairs.

Chet Fuller, a writer for the Atlanta Journal, took a hiatus from the rigors of daily reporting to travel around the South and find out if less-educated workers were able to live positive lives in the late-1970s. “In other words,” as his managing editor put it, “How much was accomplished by the civil rights movement? Can hard-working, less-educated folks make a decent life for their families in the South?” One of the last projects that caught the interest of Fuller was a “black financial empire slowly taking shape in the midst of devastating poverty.” He travelled to Greenville and visited the offices of the DF, which boasted a growing list of subsidiaries and gross sales of more than $5.8 million in fiscal 1977. The company was listed 58th out of 100 top black-owned businesses in Black Enterprises magazine. He described Charles Bannerman as a “handsome thirty-something year old” who “strides through the corporation’s offices with the self-assured air of one who truly enjoys power.”

Despite the positive strides of MACE and the DF, as well as the high hopes it brought to many in the mid-Delta, Bannerman was reluctant to deem the endeavor a success. “Rather than say we’re successful,” he explained, “I just like to say we’re growing. And that’s something I

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1019 In 1988, the three-story factory of Fine Vines Inc. burned to the ground, but they rebuilt it the following year. In 1991, they won approval from the city council for a loan of $100,000, which the business never paid back. Domestic garment makers started facing more competition from foreign companies in the 1990s. Unable to get leaner and meaner and survive, Fines Vines never established a financial position strong enough to repay the loan and went bankrupt in 1999. The North American Free Trade agreement would prove devastating to the American industrial sector, including garment makers; Ray Mikell, “City Gives Fine Vines Time on Loan,” DDT, Dec 18, 1991, p.1; JCL, Apr 9, 1991, 6E.
believe will take a long time to convince other people of. We are growing and coming along probably because we are in Mississippi. There are opportunities for blacks in Mississippi that are unavailable anywhere else.” To succeed, Bannerman believed he needed to change the public image about Mississippi. He insisted there was “a tradition of black entrepreneurship in the South, and in Mississippi there is a sense of black self-determination stronger than in any other state. It’s possible to get things accomplished in Mississippi, in terms of concrete aid to people, that could never be achieved in New York.”1021 Slowly, his focus shifted to not only the image of Mississippi, but the image of the foundation and its struggles in the years ahead.

THE LEFLORE COUNTY FARM COOPERATIVE AND THE DELTA RICE FESTIVAL

Similar to the DM’s earlier realization that idealistic projects such as crafts cooperatives were not sustainable in the long run, the DF recognized that small farmers could not compete against large-scale agribusiness, especially considering the discriminatory practices of the Farmer’s Home Administration and the various legal methods used to acquire black-owned land. Bannerman decided to start supporting the efforts of black landowners in danger of losing land in the mid-seventies, over a dozen of whom had started a farm cooperative about seven miles southeast of Drew in 1971.1022 Edward Scott Jr. and eleven other black farmers combined their acreage, purchased some more land, and established the Leflore County Farm Cooperative (LCFC), which quickly grew into one of the largest black-owned and operated collective farming enterprises in Mississippi yielding rice and soybeans in the 1970s.

1021 Ibid.
That land was some of the last black-owned farmland. W.E.B. DuBois conducted a study of the changes in black landownership for the Department of Labor around the turn of the century, which he published in a very simple article, “The Negro Landholder of Georgia.” Even in such a rote examination, he infused a trace of hopeful aspiration which characterized much of his scholarly work by emphasizing the importance of black ownership and improvement of land after the Civil War. African Americans made up almost half the population of Georgia in 1900, but they owned only four percent of private land, which seemed like a measly amount that did not support the concept of black progress. To justify the significance of such a low figure, he pointed out the heavy odds against black landowners as well as the nascent ability of blacks to improve their holdings in proportion to white landowners. DuBois offered the hopeful conclusion that blacks in Georgia had “steadily acquired property since the war…in fully 100 counties” and remained in an “unfinished cycle of property accumulation.”

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, he eschewed dull statistics in pointing out that a few thousand “poor ignorant field hands” with “throbbing human souls” had engaged a “bitter struggle, a hard and soul-sickening battle” to acquire 15,000 acres in Doherty County, which in no small measure indicated the “worth and ability of the Negro people.”

While he correctly noted the numerous obstacles that blacks had to overcome in the struggle to acquire agricultural land in the South, the statistical interpretation of Dubois was accurate only for the next decade. The amount of black-owned land increased to fifteen million acres nationwide at its height in 1910, but his predictions of a long-term increase proved a grave aberration. Due to the hardened racial views that undergirded the oppressive plantation system

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and the extensive reach of racial discrimination, the amount of black-owned land dropped to twelve million acres in 1950, and it had plummeted to less than six million acres by 1969. In the early 1970s, blacks made up an estimated eleven percent of the national population, but they owned as little as one third of one percent of all privately-owned land. By the mid-1970s, blacks owned less than four million acres of land, and the alarming rate of land loss showed no signs of abatement. African Americans lost their land increasingly due to several factors, according to the Emergency Land Fund (ELF), which worked to help retain the land that remained in the hands of black folks: “no access to capital, no muscle in the marketplace, an underutilization of educational and technical resources which are in the community—and underlying all of this, discrimination and a bias on the part of the federal government towards large agribusiness.” In 1974, the supposed land of opportunity, according to one political reporter, seemed like “more of a white man’s country…than ever before in history.”

Dubois, nevertheless, correctly asserted that landownership, efficient management, and practical improvement methods were vital to the success of black farmers as well as the black freedom struggle in the twentieth century. By acquiring control of thousands of acres of farmland through the Farm Security Administration (FSA) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), hundreds of former tenant farmers and sharecroppers in the Delta alone


1026 The rate of black land loss was so high in the early seventies due to the dubious, aggressive strategies of land speculators, who took advantage of black folks’ lack of knowledge and exposure to numerous political and legal mechanisms, such as tax sales, partition sales, and foreclosures; see Velma Payne, “The History of ELF,” *Forty Acres and a Mule* (Oct/Nov 1980): 2.


managed to gain independence from the plantation system in the 1940s. The FSA-administered land reform program, which established thirteen all-black agrarian communities across the South, was one of the most unique experiments in social planning—improving the lots of landless sharecroppers—during the New Deal.\textsuperscript{1029} It helped tenant farmers and sharecroppers buy their own farms and, thus, it planted the seeds of their independence from white exploitation under Jim Crow. Having matured for decades, the autonomous black-owned farming community of Mileston in Holmes County provided a safe haven for weary civil rights activists, who needed to recover, reorganize, develop new strategies, and organize campaigns to register voters during Freedom Summer. By using their land as collateral to bond civil rights workers out of jail, they literally put their land, homes, and livelihoods on the line along with their lives. Mileston served as an important site that safely hosted voter education workshops, Freedom Schools, leadership training programs, and community folk festivals—all of which proved not only essential to the organizing campaigns of COFO and the Freedom Democratic Party (FDP), but also provided a sobering and transformative experience out of which native black Mississippians and outside architects of the FDP realized that the federal government would not engage itself wholly in the War on Poverty.

Several leaders in the Black Power Movement (BPM) realized that embedded forms of racism had contributed to the depressed economic condition in black communities and called for reparations; other groups, such as the Emergency Land Fund (ELF) and the Federation of Southern Cooperatives (FSC), called attention to the assault on the rights of African Americans to own land. While some radical groups moved forward with an aggressive agrarian reform program, MACE and the DF developed a working relationship with both the FSC and the ELF to help small black landowners hold on to their land, establish cooperative farms, and expand their operations in the Delta. Some cooperatives consisted of several plots of land procured through the FSA in the 1940s, while other cooperatives combined the small farms of black landowners. Several black farmers owned plots of land on the seven-thousand acre plantation once known as Brooks Farm, which atypical planter Palmer Herbert Brooks established near Drew in the 1920s. Much like Chester Pond, the famous inventor and founder of Moorhead, Brooks genuinely cared about the social and economic development of his workers, despised the exploitative plantation system, and believed that landownership and community development was the key to ending workers’ dependence on the landed elites. He was the only white plantation owner in the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta who eventually transferred the majority of his holdings to African Americans. The autonomous community of black landowners and farmers, which subsequently developed on Brooks Farm, established the Leflore County Farm Cooperative (LCFC) on 160 acres in 1971.

Unable to secure individual FHA loans, the original fifteen farmers pooled their land and resources and also secured a $25,000 grant from the Black Economic Research Council (BERC),

1031 W. Webb Burke, memorandum, April 10, 1972, MSC SCR ID # 2-45-2-54-1-1-1.
a black economist think-tank which received its start from the funds generated in response to James Forman’s 1969 “Black Manifesto.” Through the *Review of Black Political Economy*, BERC director Robert Browne advocated reparations as a corrective to the disparities in wealth between blacks and whites, among other topics.\(^{1032}\) According Ed Scott, the BERC was “setup to assist blacks financially so that they might compete with whites in the business world.” He also received another $55,000 from the foundation to purchase farm equipment “with the understanding that when this equipment was not in use by Scott, it would be used to assist other small black farmers.”\(^ {1033}\) Due to the initial investment of Browne’s BERC, the cooperative farming endeavor focused on agri-production and rented the “small farms” of blacks who weren’t able to “earn a living” off the land. “We paid farmers in advance,” Scott informed, “and if they had debts that needed to be paid, we advanced money on their rent to save the land.” The LCFC also provided the landowners with employment on the farms.\(^ {1034} \) In April 1972, the Ford Foundation made $64,000 available to the cooperative for farm equipment and the following year expanded their land holdings even further with the help of the DF. By January 1974, the LCFC boasted $229,000 in. gross revenue, or $88,000 in profit for 1973. The co-op rented 1,700 acres of land, which it farmed in an arrangement that allows the landowners to live on the land in their houses and hold a job with the co-op as well as share in the net savings at the end of the year.\(^ {1035} \) Three bad crop years in a row put the cooperative in serious trouble during the mid-1970s. The LCFC turned—like many others did—to, what one local journalist described as, “a black-controlled economic corporation.” The DF put up a $40,000 loan and directed the LCFC


to other lending agencies, such as the Bank of Ruleville, which came through with a $150,000 loan. “There is no way we could have survived without the Delta Foundation,” Scott explained, because the FHA “had closed the doors on everything in this area that had small black farms.” In his mind, cooperatives such as the LCFC were small black farmers’ only hope for survival.\textsuperscript{1036}

Out of the diverse and spirited nature of rural culture in the first half of the twentieth century, African Americans established social, religious, and educational institutions, which reflected robust and rural conceptions of black identity. The residents of the former Brooks Farm near the town of Drew built upon their beliefs and personal interactions in considering the strategic location of institutions on the farm. The locations of schools and churches, for example, dissuaded local residents from coming up with excuses for being absent and encouraged fellowship. Hoping to show residents a better way of life, landowners such as Edward Scott II encouraged them “to go out to the class meetings and the church meetings so that the teaching would help them live better in the home, church, and community.”\textsuperscript{1037} The former sharecroppers and tenant farmers, who had experienced life under the exploitative plantation system, possessed strong desires to eliminate, what some scholars have called, the “plantation mentality” and make black folks “think about how they could develop the community and the people at the same time.”\textsuperscript{1038} The calculated construction of schools and churches at different locations, indeed, proved effective in ensuring high attendance levels at all community programs and activities. By carefully placing important institutions around the farm,

\textsuperscript{1037} Grim, “Black Farm Families in the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta,” 184.
\textsuperscript{1038} Ibid., 185.
local leaders also succeeded in impressing conservative cooperative values and ideals onto the cultural fabric of the black community.\footnote{R. Douglas Hurt, \textit{African American Life in the Rural South, 1900-1950} (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 124-125.}

Under the segregated system of Jim Crow, juke joints evolved as places for black folks to congregate and establish support systems. Whether a small shack, an additional room behind someone’s home, or older barns turned into nightclubs, the venues allowed folks to engage in certain activities and behavior that was not allowed in school and church. “They could be loud and talk ‘bout all kinds of things,” one Drew-native recalled, “and still be considered a Christian and a decent person.”\footnote{Estella Thomas, quoted in Valerie Grim, “African American Rural Culture, 1900-1950,” in \textit{African American Life in the Rural South, 1900-1950}, ed. R. Douglas Hurt (Columbia, MZ: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 123.} While juke joints regularly featured gambling, alcohol, noise, dancing, love affairs, and a certain amount of fighting, which marked them with a notorious reputation for violence and vice, the black folks who frequented the establishments considered them essential elements of social life in the rural Delta. The juke joints provided crucial social conduits for men and women to escape the responsibilities of their families and enjoy the company of other adults. In addition, the hard workers in the region used the venues to relax and meet up with friends. The rural culture of black folks in the Delta was indeed marked with the spirit of the “blind tigers,” as some folks referred to them in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century.\footnote{Jeanne M. Whayne, ed., \textit{Shadows over Sunnyside: An Arkansas Plantation in Transition, 1831-1945} (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1993); Louise Gordon, \textit{Caste and Class: The Black Experience in Arkansas, 1880-1920},}

The call for celebrations sparked a sense of enthusiasm and exuberance in some communities, particularly those which held numerous festivals to honor the harvesting of rice, wheat, cotton, and other farm products. Many black folks who had moved away returned in the fall for the harvest festivals, which celebrated the economic incentives of agriculture as well as the familial homecoming. These “pasture picnics,” which featured roped off areas for setting up
tables and cookouts underneath shade trees in open pastures, were certainly joyous affairs due to their familial nature and the anticipation of profits to be made. In the Delta, as historian Valerie Grim asserted, people from all over converged on the pastoral settings with their guitars, harmonicas, drums, and other homemade instruments to provide music for dancing. The pastors of local churches often made an appearance and thanked God through prayers and the singing of gospel music. At the festivals, children amused themselves by running around the pasture and turning them into baseball, football, and kickball fields; the makeshift basketball courts, card games, and cooling allure of the local swimming hole also proved attractive activities for young folks. The farmers later carried their harvest to the gins and grain elevators, sometimes stopping along the way sing songs and imbibe some of the locally distilled whiskey.  

The holiday developed by Maulana Karenga known as Kwanzaa was not drawn wholesale from a specific cultural region in Africa, but it did exist as one of the thousands of different names for harvest celebrations in local black communities. In the history books of southern African Zulu culture, Karenga located a veritable wealth of cultural traditions, which allowed him to shape the nature and meaning of Kwanzaa. He came across one particular festival called Umkhosi, one of the many large fruit ceremonies practiced in the Natal and Zululand regions of South Africa, where the culmination of the harvest came at the end of the calendar year, much like Christmas and Hanukkah. For the creators of the tradition and black folks in general, the Black Nationalist holiday served as a week of “gathering-in ourselves rather than the agricultural harvests of our ancestors.”


Drawing on the rural traditions of the harvest festival in the Delta and reflecting the older celebrations of the harvest invoked by Karenga, Ed Scott organized the Field Day and Rice Cutting Festival at the LCFC about six miles east of Drew. The rice festival was the climax of a “fascinating and intriguing crop year” for the farm cooperative. Having received funds from MACE, the DF, and the Southern Cooperative Development Fund (SCDF), manager Ed Scott “proudly pointed out” the cooperative farm had built three 20,000-bushel grain bins over the summer, each of which was equipped with augers, air blowers, and butane heaters. The LCFC owned four large combines, which cut the rice heads off the stalk, threshed out the grain, deposited it in an 85-bushel hopper, and discharged the chaff and straw. The cooperative had farmed 3,200 acres in 1976; 860 acres of rice, which yielded about 100 bushels per acre; 1,800 acres of soybeans, and the remainder in cotton and wheat. The cooperative farm attracted maybe one hundred guests, friends, and business associates to the rural festival, which featured a large cook-out with barbequed ribs and chicken as well as other “delicious food.” While the guests ate and engaged in fellowship, the combines harvested the nearby rice fields. Ed Scott not only directed the harvesting process, “the energetic farmer seemed to be everywhere at once—in the fields, at the bins, here and there hosting guests.”

Though the earliest events did not feature music, MACE initiated the Delta Arts Project the following year as well as realized that the cooperative needed to incorporate to attract more capital. With the aid of DF and financing from SCDF, the First National Bank of Greenville, the Bank of Ruleville, MACE, and the Opportunity Funding Corporation, the LCFC had grown

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1044 “Rice Cutting Festival at Leflore County Farm Co-Op,” *VOS* 2:8 (October 1976): 2.
1045 The growth of the LCFO came about with less than $40,000 in equity capital, and it continued to borrow money in order to maintain operations. Even though such borrowing was “common practice in agricultural finance,” the debt ratio of the LCFO was 24-1 at the end of 1976. The high ratio provides only limited capital, however, to expand operations; *Poor, Rural, and Southern* (New York: Ford Foundation, 1978), 17.
to twenty five members over the course on 1977. On Saturday, September 17, the Delta sun was good and hot, the rice bowed back and forth with the breeze, and it was ready for cutting as the combines hummed through the fields on the LCFC’s 3rd annual Rice Cutting and Field Day. From noon until well past dark, the rice fields near Drew played host to over 250 people who had gathered for the occasion. Happy children ran and laughed through the muddy fields and the harvested rice, took rides on the big, heavy farm equipment and ate barbeque, vegetables, homemade rolls, and delectable rice dishes. The adults sipped cool drinks, toured the fields and escaped to the shade of the large equipment pavilion where a long, wide flatbed truck served as a stage upon which several musicians delivered performances.

Opening the show was the Parchman Penitentiary Band with an appropriate country sound. Next came the Heavenly Gospel Singers of Jackson, Miss., a group of four spirit-filled Christian men who had sung praises to the Lord as a group for over 40 years. Following them were the Chuck Berry Singers of Greenville, twelve young gospel singers with inspirational harmonic voices. The three young ladies who made up the Delta MACE-Aires rendered some gospel in the style of “ye old time religion,” according to one writer for The Voice of SCIMPH, the official organ of MACE. Mayors Violett Leggette of Gunnison and Gregory Flippins of Shaw along with Howard Boutte, of the Southern Cooperative Development Fund (SCDF), took the stage and spoke about the growth and importance of black political power. Ed Scott, president of farm cooperative, also delivered a short speech and introduced the headlining entertainers for the event. Highlighting the program were local blues singers James “Son” Thomas and Lil’ Bill Wallace, “both of whom, one writer for The Voice of SCIMPH noted, “represent the Delta Blues, a traditional folk art indigenous to the Delta.”

1047 Ibid.
Lois Magee, editor of *The Voice*, called it a historic occasion for the cooperative and the Mississippi Delta. Almost bursting with pride in the achievements of African Americans from the Delta, she stood amazed and watched performances of “country music, gospel music, and the blues all on the same program and all on a farm.” And not just any old farm. “This farm is special,” she beamingly asserted. This was an incorporated and black-owned farm. It was “the largest agricultural effort by minorities in the southeastern United States,” and it had been setup by a prominent black landowner. Emma Cooper Harris, of the Sharkey-Issaquena County Improvement Association, remembered attending a couple of years. “We all went over there,” she explained, “They cut the rice that day. They were singing blues. We were eating fish and neckbones, ham hocks. But that was not the beginning of the blues festival.”

Indeed, the rice festival harkened back more to the harvest festivals in the rural regions of the past, but there was blues too. It was not considered gutbucket blues either. The blues was embraced by most as a uniquely American musical tradition that had developed in the communities of the formerly enslaved and their children. The majority of African American middle-class churchgoers would still seek to set themselves apart by denigrating the blues and blues artists, and MACE did not ignore their continued protests. There would be many more opportunities for them to come around.

On September 23, 1978, a crowd of seven hundred people gathered six miles east of Drew to celebrate the 3rd annual Rice Cutting and Field Day Festival of the Leflore-Bolivar County Land Corporation (LBLC), formerly known as the Leflore County Land Co-op. Earlier in the year, the L-BCLC received financial backing to increase its land holdings from 370 to 880 acres, formally incorporated, and employed twelve full-time workers and hired as many as

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1048 Emma Cooper Harris, interview by T. DeWayne Moore, June 6, 2013, Anguilla, Mississippi.
twenty more laborers to help harvest the beans and rice, a task which required twelve-hour work days and lasted up to two months, making it “the largest black-owned business dedicated to agriculture” in the state.1049

An air of excitement floated over the fields of rice being harvested by busy workers as streams of cars, vans, trucks, and buses, poured in from all over the Delta [and] strains of music from the Parchman Band amid the sounds of tractors and combines and the tantalizing smell of barbeque greeted visitors approaching the festival site.1050

“Noted for his shrewd and successful farming techniques,” LBLC president Ed Scott III had stopped planting cotton several years ago, because its inflated costs and insufficient yields did not suit the financial interests of the farm co-op. In 1978, the L-BCLC planted 1,100 acres of rice and 1,600 acres of soybeans. Though the state experienced a drought over the summer that hurt yields on several farms, none of the L-BCLC’s soybeans “burned up.”1051

The previous year’s event attracted a couple of the regions political candidates to the rice cutting and field day festival in 1978. Second District Representative David Bowen, a native Mississippian educated at Harvard and Oxford as a political scientist, once served as coordinator of state-federal programs under Governor John Bell Williams. By working to implement programs under the Great Society, he laid the foundations for a successful bid for congress in 1972, beating out his Republican opponent, Louisville veterinarian Roland Byrd. He served in his position from 1973 to 1983, partly due to the appeals that he made to black voters.

The 1970 Census had mandated the redistricting of the state’s congressional seats, which created a new political map. Bowen maneuvered to keep Bolivar County in the new second

1050 Ibid.
district to facilitate his run for congressman of the new district, which stretched from the hills of Lowndes County to the Queen City of the Delta. His success impelled some candidates to drop out of the race and certainly made Bowen the favorite against returning challenger and *Mississippi Liberal* Frank E. Smith. Bowen had spent four years doling out millions of federal dollars to sheriffs and supervisors in support of the president’s Great Society. In anticipation of a career in politics, the former professor had adulterated press releases and manipulated speaking engagements to win friends and influence voters in the district. While he also developed personal relationship with the administrators of the county Head Start programs, he exploited inadequate local newspaper coverage across the disjointed district, which gave him the freedom to tell each group what it wanted to hear without having to worry about his comments being printed on the front page the next morning.

The voting record of Republicans Thad Cochran and Trent Lott was very similar to that of their three Democratic colleagues, Sonny Montgomery, Jamie Whitten, and David Bowen. Each representative voted against the use of busing to facilitate school desegregation, the funding of abortions, and a policy mandating coed physical education. Certainly recognizing the impetus of slowing down the work of civil rights lawyers in Mississippi, all of the representatives voted to restrict lawyers working for the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) from filing suit against local government. On issues of foreign policy and race, the delegation also voted against a ban on the importation of chrome from Ian Smith’s white-minority government in Rhodesia, even though that country was under international sanctions. The vote for closer relations with Rhodesia meant that the Mississippi representatives backed a position not very different from that of the Citizens’ Councils, which saw Rhodesia and South Africa as the last bulwarks of

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Bannerman had invited both Bowen and his opposition to speak at the rice festival, which mainly featured speakers who reinforced the ideas of black self-empowerment and capitalist growth. Charles McTeer, the city’s newly appointed city prosecutor who Bannerman enticed over to the mid-Delta, briefly addressed the crowd. Howard Boutte, of the Southern Cooperative Development Fund, who had helped the L-BLC get off the ground with loans for operating capital and machinery, delivered a speech that stressed the importance of black economic power. “It’s not good enough for blacks just to get survival pay. It’s different when you labor for someone else and when you labor for what you own.”\footnote{David Saltz, “Black Co-op Harvests Sixth Crop,” \textit{DDT}, Sep 24, 1978, p.3.} Sponsored by the Delta Foundation, the L-BLC invited the public to its fourth annual rice cutting and field day on September 23, 1978. Karen Shalong Morgan, director of public affairs for MACE, served as emcee of a musical program, which featured Son Thomas, Lil’ Bill Wallace, the Delta MACE Aires of
Greenville, the Heavenly Gospel Singers of Jackson, the Parchman Farm Band, and the Greenwood Jubilees.  

Inside a “mammoth tractor shed,” veteran Bolivar County farm agent I.D. Thompson informed the gathering that the land corporation “shows what can be done when technology and management are applied.” In his opinion, the corporation had derived from the “vision of Ed Scott, Sr.,” and it managed to succeed despite agriculture’s “state of confusion,” boasting low market prices and high production costs. Ed Scott Jr. held a ceremony and presented six awards to men who helped start the cooperative and turn it into a land corporation. Ruleville Bank president R.W. Holladay received recognition for his financial support. Indianola attorney Tommy McWilliams worked tirelessly to secure a million-dollar loan from the FHA. Drew attorney P.J. Townsend facilitated the co-op’s first purchase of 160 acres. MACE director Charles Bannerman received an award “for financing the only black-owned rice storage facilities in Mississippi.” Vance Nimrod, of the Delta Foundation, also provided the co-op with much technical assistance. And, finally, Ed Scott handed an award to his son, Isaac Scott, for his “loyal service to the operation during its first six years. Three generations of the Scott family had farmed outside Drew, however, and only barely did they manage to keep and increase their holdings. While the festival celebrated black self-determination and reflected a very robust and rural, conservative embodiment of black power, the promotional campaign of MACE served to obscure the plight of most black farming communities in the Delta, who had lost their land or were engaged in a losing fight to retain it. Bowen had no problem courting the votes of African Americans and then voting against their interests, and Bannerman’s ties to the state’s political elite had remained controversial for the rest of his tenure.

The gains of middle-class African Americans obscured the fact that millions of blacks in the South remained mired in poverty in the late 1970s. Even with all the gains of the previous twenty years, the welfare rolls remained full; malnutrition was a serious problem. Most community development groups that relied on the sympathy of whites in the North had closed their doors. “We’re not a romantic quilting bee…We’ve brought in close to $20 million to this area,” Bannerman revealed, and “we’ve paid out over six million in salaries, which is about equal to what the state of Mississippi has paid in welfare in this area.” Most African Americans living in Mississippi, however, remained dependent on white-dominated businesses and institutions for work, which made progress slow on the tax base front.

In one interview with Mississippi Valley State University professor Robert Young, who had Tom Dent suggested that most folks who had been involved in local demonstrations had not benefitted from the victories of the movement in the 1960s. They “not only did not benefit,” Young asserted, but “they were actually punished” and continued to lack access to certain jobs in 1979. In line with one article in Time magazine, Young decried the growing chasm between the black middle class and less fortunate blacks. Whereas social status was based on the degree of whiteness under Jim Crow, with lighter-skinned blacks making up the black middle-class, the new black middle-class of the 1970s had benefitted from the social gains in the 1960s and consisted largely of young black professionals, who worked in business management, accounting, and social services. Young described the members of the black middle-class as “making twenty [or] thirty thousand dollars, wearing suits every day, and buying their little fancy cars, and buying a house in a white neighborhood.”

Those people have no understanding at all of what the movement was all about. They were never involved. If they were involved, [it was] only distantly. No indeed. They may have read the history…but they were not involved in it…they were acculturated in a different kind of way. [While some] know more about the history than you or me in terms of what was taught to them through books, a large number of them don’t know anything about [black] history because they went to southern schools [and] may have had one black history course the entire time. So most of them don’t know anything about it, but the ones that do know something about it, they’re not concerned about that; they are concerned about being middle-class—middle-class in the worst kind of way.1059

The establishment of community actions organizations, he argued, had helped create the new black middle-class in its mission to provide jobs in industry and social services. Young also asserted that the young black factory workers, who managed to finish high school and find local employment paying well over minimum wage, demonstrated another segment of the new black middle-class in Greenville. “Even that group,” he exclaimed, “I bet you they don’t even vote.”

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He pointed out that the Delta Foundation would not hire folks who lacked “marketable skills,” which left out almost “all the people who struggled to put” the foundation in its current position. The money producing factories of the Delta Foundation were all “run by whites.” The top managers in the corporation were all white people, “each and every one,” Young explained, because the Delta Foundation failed to find good, experienced factory managers within the black communities of the Delta. Young, however, admitted how difficult it was to find local blacks qualified to write grant proposals and administer community action programs, which may have prompted Bannerman “to bring on a different group of people.”1061

1059 Ibid.
1060 Ibid.
1061 Ibid.
The DF can legitimately claim credit for creating hundreds of jobs in a region where welfare is widespread, he added, but “when judged on the quality of its jobs and investments it “has been a failure.” Despite its early vision of economic self-determination and institution building, MACE founder and original DF board member Ed Brown asserted, the leadership of Charles Bannerman “has meant some poor people have moved from ‘Mr. Charlie's’ plantation to Charles’s plantation.” Aaron Henry, a state representative from Clarksdale, claimed that the only problem with that the DF lacked the resources to meet the region's tremendous needs. Many other people saw the DF becoming more concerned with perpetuating itself and expanding its political influence than in creating new and lasting opportunities for the region’s poor. No one accused Bannerman of any illegalities, but the founders of the foundation, as well as federal audits and internal reports, portrayed a foundation that provided only a small number of minimum-wage jobs and sometimes gave loans to well-placed individuals who could have received traditional forms of financing.\footnote{Linda Williams, “Mixed Reviews: Despite Much Praise, Delta Foundation Inc. is Harshly Criticized—Defenders Say it has Helped Poor Blacks; Detractors Fault its Lending Policies—what is a 'Meaningful' Job?” \textit{Wall Street Journal}, Oct 2, 1984, p.1.}

The DF had received twenty-nine million in federal aid and sixteen million from private sources. Yet, it remained in need of contributions, both of money and professional services in 1984. In 1978, the DF provided an estimated one thousand jobs, but it employed only four hundred in 1984. The number of factories once in operation (eight) was down to five in 1984, only two of which—one making attic stairs, the other electronic parts—were profitable. The goal of helping to aid development in seventeen counties looked abandoned in lieu of the channeling of more than $933,000 in loans and investments to businesses in other states. The Delta Ministry and other organizations in Mississippi created the DF to help the poor, but
Bannerman had lent more than $200,000 to doctors, lawyers, and dentists, including an influential white state senator, in the early 1980s. He spoke about providing meaningful jobs and needed community services, but most of its employees made little more than minimum wage and many of its loans went to restaurants, nightclubs and video arcades. The web of financial relationships connecting the foundation and its subsidiaries—and Bannerman’s central role in all of them—was a cause of growing concern among critics as well as former allies.\textsuperscript{1063} No longer dedicated to alleviating the plight of the poor, the wheels had come off of the once promising foundation since 1978—at the same time that the decision was made to carefully construct its public image. Bannerman’s decision to engage the public coincided with the shift in foundation policy, all of which, like the voting record of David Bowen, worked against the interests of lower-class African Americans and undermined the efforts of MACE.

The intensification of class differences was significant among African Americans in the early 1980s, but it also reflected longstanding segmentation in the black community. Before the Civil War, free blacks and slave artisans were part of an elite segment of the black population. These antebellum black elites and their descendants, moreover, tended to maintain their status in Reconstruction. The growth of the black middle and upper classes during the seventies stemmed directly from the gains of the movement. Though widespread black poverty made clear the limits of the black freedom struggle, a large number of African Americans benefitted from the campaigns against racial segregation, specifically in regards to college education. The number of African Americans age twenty-five and older with a college education almost tripled from 1960 to 1980, rising from seven to twenty percent. The gains in education led to occupational advances during the seventies, when blacks in the professional and skilled trades increased at a

\textsuperscript{1063} Ibid.
rate (55%) much higher than that of whites (34%). Even though the number of black managers and administrators rose a dramatic 69% as opposed to only 34% for whites, African Americans held only a small proportion of the upper-echelon jobs.\textsuperscript{1064} The Delta Foundation created six thousand jobs in its first 26 years, historian Mark Newman argues, but the foundation lacked the resources to make any significant impact on the massive unemployment problem in the Delta, which stemmed from large-scale agricultural changes, the unwillingness of most industries to locate plants in the region, a confluence of macroeconomic forces outside of their control, and racial discrimination by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which improperly denied benefits to African American farmers from, at the very least, January 1983 to January 1997.\textsuperscript{1065}


Charles Bannerman, one of the most popular black business leaders in Mississippi during mid-1970s, was optimistic about the future in early 1977. By employing more than three hundred people at manufacturing plants in Greenville, Sardis, Memphis and Canton, he had achieved much success as board chairman of the Delta Foundation. Since taking over for Ed Brown, he also expanded the community organization efforts of Mississippi Action for Community Education (MACE), which worked with affiliates in eleven Delta counties, boasted an estimated 25,000 dues-paying members, operated Upward Bound educational programs in several counties, and recently completed a $1.5 million, low-income apartment complex and recreational center called Pride Gardens in Madison County.\footnote{In recognition of his “outstanding achievements and leadership in the promotion of community social and economic development among the poor,” Bannerman won the $10,000 John D. Rockefeller III youth award, which he accepted on behalf of all the Mississippians who devoted their time, sweat, and energy to community development in the Delta.\footnote{After making quite an impression at a minority business conference organized by the administration of presidential candidate Jimmy Carter in Atlanta, Bannerman served on boards and organizations with Secretary of Labor Ray}^1066\footnote{Ibid.}}

\footnote{“Bannerman Wins $10,000 Youth Award,” \textit{DDT}, May 9, 1976, p.7.}
Marshall and Secretary of Commerce Juanita Kreps. There were rumors he was on a short list to head the Community Services Administration (CSA), formerly known as the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO).1068 In a bold statement of his commitment to the people of the Delta, he rejected a $50,000-a-year job offer to serve as deputy administrator for programs of the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) in Washington D.C., explaining that “if all the talent left the rural areas for the important organization positions up in Washington, then there would be few people left to implement legislation coming out of those levels of government under the Carter administration.” He maintained that minority economic development was not solely an urban issue. It was indeed a national issue, and he planned to bring greater economic, social, and political opportunities to the Delta and the rest of the South.1069

Bannerman sought to cultivate the public image of MACE and expand its approach to community organizing. Following the controversy over the 1976 Mainstream Festival in Greenville, the chamber-sponsored event which one local militant charged was “entirely geared for white people,” the lack of recognition and appreciation for the cultural contributions of African American was grotesquely clear to activists and community organizers in Washington County. Donald Sutton, of the Delta Ministry (DM), responded by obtaining the city’s permission to hold a black awareness festival in Strange Park, but he was forced to cancel the event due to a lack of funding and time for proper planning. He wanted to organize a celebration that sent a “message to the people” that consisted of “more than music and dancing.”1070 The glaring absence of community-based programs and exhibitions highlighting the artistic and cultural contributions of African Americans had creating a festering wound in the heart of


370
Greenville. The need to redress these silences was evident not only in Washington County but also the surrounding counties of the Delta, many of which boasted an affiliate of MACE. In the year of its tenth anniversary, the community action group broadened its organizational philosophy to include cultural programming and took well-organized steps to institutionalize cultural education for the rural poor in the Delta.

In late 1976, MACE decided to establish a new department to improve the visibility and credibility of local affiliates as well as increase public interest and support for the organizations. In its first ten years, MACE had operated on a “low-key, minor visibility basis,” but it realized the need to establish a department of public affairs in light of the realization that poor folks remained largely ignorant of services available to them through MACE affiliates and that the local press and other media did not serve the organization’s constituency. By promoting the capabilities of local, grassroots organizations, MACE hoped to foster community self-improvement initiatives and improve the “quality of life” in the poverty-stricken counties in the Delta and adjacent hill country of northern Mississippi. In early 1977, the community action organization also recognized that the majority of people it served had limited, and in many cases non-existent, access to cultural programs. MACE established its new public relations department and initiated the Delta Arts Project (DAP) in response to the lack of exhibitions and education initiatives centered on the resilient cultural traditions and rich heritage of African Americans in the Delta. The person responsible for the initial grant proposal was a newcomer to the Queen City, who became the driving force behind the Delta Arts Project. She called herself K. Shalong Morgan during her time in Greenville. Her given name was Karen Elaine League.
Born in Nashville on October 18, 1950 to Thomas League and Dorothy Hamilton, Karen Elaine League moved with her parents at a young age to the Southside of Chicago.\textsuperscript{1071} Believing it was “too rough” a place to raise a child, however, her parents shuttled her back and forth between the two cities for most of her early life, which provided the young woman a “little taste of both the city and the country.”\textsuperscript{1072} While she enjoyed a pleasant childhood while living with her godmother in Nashville, it was the precious social relationships and unforgettable cultural experiences in Chicago that grounded her passionate and uninhibited visions of the future. In the 1950s and 60s, her mother and a woman named Maxine Webb were the co-owners of a nightclub on the Southside, which impressed a confident mental image about the entrepreneurial abilities of black women. The flamboyant musicians and female entertainers who performed at the club, moreover, bequeathed a host of vivid memories in her young mind about all the assertive personalities and rich cultural traditions in the Bronzeville neighborhood, an urban black refuge for visual and musical artists, business owners, elected officials and activists, otherwise known as the “Black Metropolis.”\textsuperscript{1073} Of particular significance to black youths, the \textit{Chicago Defender} newspaper sponsored an annual parade in honor of its “mythical guardian angel of children” and popular comic strip character Bud Billiken. The parade attracted thousands of African Americans, regularly featured popular black entertainers and national political figures, and symbolized the exuberance, hope and pride in black achievement.\textsuperscript{1074} Dorothy League and Maxine Webb on occasion had the privilege of riding in the parade that had engendered such a
unique sense of racial identity and excited the imaginations the community’s black youths.\textsuperscript{1075} Her mother also took her to the Regal Theatre to concerts, one of which featured an up-and-coming entertainer with silky smooth vocals named Lou Rawls. His records and performances made a profound impression on the future songstress.\textsuperscript{1076} While impressed with the exciting pace and rich cultural landscape of black life on the Southside, the young woman especially cherished the time and attention of her loving mother, a respectable local business woman who passed away most unexpectedly in the late 1960s.

At the age of thirteen, League started to attend Cameron High School in Nashville, which offered an unofficial curriculum focused on the middle-class politics of respectability. The school teachers stressed the importance of proper dress, acceptable behavior, and integrity among its less affluent student body. Considering that Jim Crow segregation barred them from public places, such as skating rinks and lunch counters, teachers and parents took the time to acquaint the young men and women with the professional etiquette needed to succeed in the largely unfamiliar social and business world. In addition, the school developed programs highlighting music as well as visual and dramatic arts to instill a larger sense of cultural awareness. Leonard Morton, a professional vocalist and jazz musician, had moved from Chicago to serve as the band director at Cameron, and he set the standard for school music departments in Nashville during the 1960s.\textsuperscript{1077} League played saxophone in Morton’s concert band, and she marched as both a Pantherette and later as a Majorette in the Cameron High School Marching Band, which traveled to appear in parades throughout middle Tennessee.\textsuperscript{1078}

\textsuperscript{1075} She admired one particular blues singer from Detroit named Jazzy Baby, who “used to dress up a lot—she’d have matching purple hair, purple dress, purple nails, purple shoes.”
\textsuperscript{1078} Karen Elaine League Rawlins, email to author, July 5, 2015.
Though she considered Morton a “memorable mentor,” League’s experiences in the Cameron High School drama program demonstrated to her the importance of cultural awareness and understanding in, what she called, “the quest for world peace and equality.” After the production of *Witness for the Prosecution* in the spring of 1967, Cameron High School drama teacher and former Fisk Jubilee Singer H. German Wilson learned of an opportunity to magnify his work with young people over the summer through “Drama In and Out of the Streets,” a federally funded program of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), based at the Edgehill United Methodist Church. He subsequently organized a performing troupe of eleven high school students and one college freshman called the Princely Players, which staged professional performances in drama, dance and “a cappella” singing. “He believed that all children possessed an innate creative spirit,” one former student explained, “that if tapped, would encourage self-love and an outflow of tension which in turn would help create an environment that is conducive to heightened growth and development.”

The original group of players included intelligent and gifted artists such as musician Odessa Settles and Gloria Ransom, a niece of former Grand Ole Opry star DeFord Bailey. League was also one of the original players handpicked by Wilson, who had come of age during the Civil Rights Movement and welcomed the burgeoning Black Power Movement as they graduated high school. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had organized less than successful demonstrations for poor people in Chicago, and the Black Panthers had held armed demonstrations on the steps of the California state capitol. Even though “a lot of young people

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1079 Karen Elaine League Rawlins, email to author, July 5, 2015.
were in silent turmoil,” as Ransom put it, Wilson helped give voice to the students’ frustrations through the Princely Players. 1082  League recalled how they “engaged in community service” and worked as “volunteers, child caretakers and tutors,” conferring powerful lessons in “African American history, cultural pride, and the Civil Rights movement.” 1083

In the following school year, the Princely Players performed at schools and churches in Nashville, Knoxville and Chattanooga. The group performed at local university art festivals, including the Fisk University Fine Arts Festival and the Vanderbilt University Angry Arts Festival. 1084  They also performed at northern venues, particularly Temple University in Philadelphia and Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. The subject matter and nature of their performances evoked visceral images and proved controversial at the time, in many ways reflecting the compelling dramas of Amiri Baraka and other talented playwrights involved with the Black Arts Movement. 1085  Some scenes, for example, depicted the trauma of slave auctions and reenacted the terrible brutality of lynchings. 1086

In May 1968, when the poor people’s march on Washington stopped at the Fairgrounds Coliseum in Nashville, the Princely Players opened up for SCLC leader James Bevel, whose fiery speech denounced the economic system in America. Dressed in “bright clothes” and wearing their hair in “African style,” the groups of actors walked onstage singing, “We Shall

1083 Karen Elaine League Rawlins, email to author, July 5, 2015.
Overcome.” delivered dramatic monologues and emotional vocal performances. “A policeman is a dishonor to his badge,” opened one commentary on institutional racism. “They bloody my head. In Detroit, police shot in an apartment with a 50-caliber machine gun—rat-ta-tat-tat—and killed a four-year-old sniper. And then you can’t understand why we hate the white man.” In another portion of the presentation, they performed a song called, “The Backlash Blues.”

The Metro Action Commission (MAC) had already cut off financial support to the program at the end of the previous summer, but Wilson needed a requisite amount of funds to continue operating a coffeehouse in Edge Hill called “The Block” at the corner of 12th and Grand. He organized a benefit performance and collected enough to keep the doors open for the next year, until a group of local blacks could take control of the popular hangout spot.

It probably would have taken much less than the sound of a machine firing off half a clip for some folks to label the Players as a hate group after reading the article in the Tennessean about the fairgrounds performance. According to one Nashville activist, Cameron High School fired German Wilson and a preacher associated with the Princely Players shortly after it came out. Wilson had been accused of running a “hate whitey” school, which brought an abrupt end to the group’s performances. Almost all of the original members, including League, graduated from Cameron in the spring of 1968. Wilson accepted a job offer to direct the summer school program of the Hill-Arts Theatre at Yale University. Some of the students went on to college or an exhilarating new challenge in the promising and daunting years ahead. “Through dramas,” Wilson argued, the Princely Players learned that each one of them “can speak out

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and contribute to the dignity of the black man in this country.” The performances commented on current events as opposed to utopian ideals. Wilson maintained that the contemporary black artist “stands in a very special relationship to his people.” By seizing on this relationship, the Princely Players had “made a statement about the situation of black folks” in America.1090

Having excelled as a student, won awards for her dramatic performances, and served as student council president during her senior year, League received a national merit scholarship to study over the summer in the summer program of her mentor at Yale University. The future seemed promising for the well-rounded young woman as she matriculated to Vassar College in the fall. Due to her theatrical experience in high school with the Princely Players, she made an easy decision to major in the dramatic arts and minor in psychology. It did not take long for her to settle into her new environment, and the town of Poughkeepsie, New York soon pulled her, along with several of her college roommates, to “one of the local juke joints” for a couple of drinks and some live music. The outgoing young coed eventually walked on stage, grabbed a microphone, and harmonized somewhat impulsively with the house band. The spontaneous exhibition proved quite impressive, as she soon found herself performing with the group on weekends in town. She later performed with other rhythm and blues groups that supplied “that stompin,’ everybody-get-up-and-dance music” and played one-night stands in venues as far away as Connecticut.1091

In 1969, League was barely a sophomore when she fell in love with a slightly older man named Anival Barrett, whom she married in a rural ceremony in the Catskills. “As was the custom of young Black activists during that time,” League explained, the young couple took the names Ashalong and Shalong and found a common passion in promoting the cultural heritage of

Africa. The young lovers “shared, learned, and taught African American history, African dance and music to students and adults in the Poughkeepsie community,” becoming quite adept on instruments such as the conga drums, flute, and thumb piano, among other percussive instruments.\textsuperscript{1092} From that point, she used the name Shalong in her singing career. In 1971, the couple had their first child, Kashi-Tara Shalong Barrett, after which she finished her bachelor’s degree at Vassar. Having convinced herself to pursue a career on stage, she induced her husband to move to Detroit, as she was spoiling to go “chasing after Motown.”\textsuperscript{1093}

While continuing to sing in nightclubs under the name Shalong, the attractive young mother pursued other opportunities under the name of Karen Elaine Barrett, picking up some part-time work as a model at the Afbony School of Modeling and Talent. Upon learning of her significant experience in the dramatic arts, the school’s director Camille Leraine offered her a position teaching related skills, such as communication, public speaking, and personal grooming. After designing and outlining the curriculum for several other courses, Shalong earned the new title of talent management director, and she taught courses in theatre, singing, dancing, and modeling.\textsuperscript{1094} Drawing on her experience with the Princely Players, she selected twenty-five of the most talented students and organized a repertory company called the Paul Robeson Players, which performed at various venues around the city of Detroit.

In 1974, Ashalong and Shalong moved their daughter into the Fountain Court Cooperative, a newly constructed housing complex for 250 families, where they served as the initial director and assistant director of the adjacent Fountain Court Community Center. Their duties included developing cultural enrichment programs, tutoring programs, and exercise

\textsuperscript{1092} Karen Elaine League Rawlins, email to author, July 5, 2015.  
\textsuperscript{1093} Karen Elaine League Rawlins, telephone interview by T. DeWayne Moore, September 6, 2013.  
programs, as well as conducting various activities including sports, games, and field trips. Designed as after-school and evening activities, the programs centered on enhancing the entire family’s quality of life and fostering self-pride through cultural experience, education and sports.

Shalong continued to direct the Paul Robeson Players while living at Fountain Court, and once the talented group established a reputation in the metropolitan area, it managed to attract the attention of local playwright Ron Milner as well as recording artist Gladys Knight. Shalong never learned the true nature and extent of their interest, however, due to her increasing marital problems and eventual divorce from Anival Barrett, who moved out west, leaving her to take care of their young daughter.1095

Shalong had to take a job managing a car rental service to support herself and her young daughter.1096 In regards to her singing career, Shalong had secured a couple of gigs singing backup on a few records, but Motown had lost most of its unique, innovative production aesthetic during its evolution from a small independent to a quasi-major label. The commercial and artistic successes of the Motown label had largely eliminated the once-praised “creative” atmosphere surrounding its recording operations in the late 1960s, as young artists increasingly lacked access to executives and decision makers, who relinquished talent scouting duties to the label’s Artists & Repertoire (A&R) division. Lacking tolerance for spontaneity and experimentation, young producers subordinated themselves to the label’s standards and molded artists to fit Motown’s music concept.1097 In light of her questionable prospects in a record

1095 Karen Elaine League Rawlins, email to author, July 5, 2015.
industry that some folks believed stifled creativity, she decided to sign up as a back-up singer with a touring cover band. It proved an especially fateful decision.

In her continuing efforts as a songstress, Shalong became romantically involved with the band’s experienced drummer Theotis Morgan, of Greenville. He had demonstrated his remarkable abilities as a percussionist on Albert King’s live album, *Live Wire/Blues Power*, recorded at the Fillmore Auditorium in June 1968.1098 The couple got married in a fever on September 3, 1976 at the courthouse in Sumner County, Tennessee.1099 Having quit the band, the newlyweds moved under what she described as “shadowy circumstances” back to the hometown of her husband, the Queen City of the Mississippi Delta. The plan was to continue travelling and playing music, she recalled, but her husband “got off on a whole different track” once he returned to Greenville. The couple’s personal life soon “fell apart,” ending their marriage almost as soon as it began. “I felt very disillusioned,” Shalong recalled, because “I thought I was gonna be working as a popular singer and travelling with this band, and that did not happen.” Finding herself “sort of stranded” in the Delta, once again she needed a job to support her daughter.1100 In late 1976, she accepted a position in marketing, advertising, and public relations at the First National Bank of Greenville, an institution that coincidentally supported MACE and enjoyed the frequent patronage of its charismatic director Charles Bannerman.1101

1098 Theotis Morgan was born in June 19, 1939 in Greenville to farmers Otis and Florence Morgan; see, 1940; Census Place: Greenville, Washington, Mississippi, Roll: T627_2075, Page: 30B, Enumeration District: 76-16.
BUILDING THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF MACE

*Black Enterprise* magazine described Bannerman as a “handsome thirty-something year old” who walked with the “self-assured air of one who truly enjoys power,” and Shalong managed to established a rapport with the respected business and community development leader.\(^{1102}\) After learning about her musical talent and cultural education experience, Bannerman recognized that she had the type of assets needed to direct the newly-created public affairs department of MACE/Delta. In early 1977, therefore, he lured her away from the bank with an attractive position as public relations specialist for MACE and the Delta Foundation.\(^{1103}\) Even though her tenure was brief, Shalong exceeded all expectations with her immersive approach and proved a crucial figure in fashioning the public image of the formerly reclusive organization. Going well beyond her role as public relations specialist, she spearheaded efforts to establish the new cultural arm of the organization, the Delta Arts Project, an achievement which she considered one of her “proudest accomplishments.”\(^{1104}\)

Though she possessed natural talent as well as some experience as a community organizer and publicist, Shalong attended the same training sessions as all other incoming field coordinators at MACE. Instructors taught her to identify the needs of local communities as well as locate available resources to meet those needs on a local, regional, and national level. In February, Bannerman and Shalong travelled to Washington D.C. as two of four representatives

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\(^{1102}\) In one interview with Shirley Netterville, who had a daughter of Bannerman’s in 1971 and maintained a sexual relationship with him until she moved in 1973, she referred to him as something like a “Casanova, a ladies man. Women liked him, and he liked women…He had swagger, definitely did,” and he once told her that “the Mississippi Delta had the most beautiful women”; see, Shirley Netterville, interview by T. DeWayne Moore, September 9, 2013, Greenville, Mississippi; for more on the swagger of Bannerman, see Chet Fuller, *I Hear Them Calling My Name: A Journey Through the New South* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), 236.


of MACE/Delta at the tenth anniversary celebration of the National Congress for Community Economic Development (NCCED), which brought community development corporations (CDCs) from across the country together to share information, solve problems, and encourage mutual development.1105 “An aura of excitement prevailed,” she recalled, at workshop sessions on topics such as financial resources, proposal writing, newsletters, investment, measurement, and marketing. The schedule also included panel discussions on congressional support and government programs, private foundations, the support system of the NCCED, and opportunities for rural CDCs. Shalong did not only absorb the knowledge and wisdom imparted by various speakers at the “unprecedented event,” she also promoted the successful rural programs of MACE/Delta and established lines of communication with the representatives of other CDCs—resources which she drew upon to build an effective public relations department.1106

Charles Bannerman, in light of the realizations that poor folks did not know about all the available services from the growing organizational structure of MACE, established a public relations department and K. Shalong Morgan, as she then referred to herself, set the agenda and scope of its duties. While the most salient function of the public relations department was the identification and development of programs to meet the humanist and cultural needs of its constituency, the new department also extended services in other, more practical forms. Shalong helped the members of MACE and its affiliates distribute press releases normally ignored by the local press to the national media as well as solicit coverage for new projects and special events. She also helped members design layouts and get cost estimates for publications, brochures, posters and circulars. So that low-income people might make better use of affiliate services, she

1105 Scott Daugherty and Dianne Danley also attended the event.
assisted non-profits and minority-controlled municipalities in presenting their scope of services to the community.

The public relations office of MACE was the recently acquired Elks Lodge building at the corner of Washington Avenue and Hinds Street in Greenville’s Blanton Park. When contractors built it in 1905, the Greenville Times described the three-story masonry block building as a Neo-classic structure, which held a billiard hall, barbershop and a full library complete with expensive and rare oil paintings. It measured 113 feet long by 50 feet wide and featured both gas and electric lighting. The first of its original three levels consisted of offices, meeting rooms, and a bowling alley, the second floor contained a large ballroom, and the third floor featured a small theatre on a raked floor, a stage and dressing rooms. The building was a fixture in Greenville’s racially segregated social scene for the next fifty years. MACE had planned for the building to serve as its new headquarters, but the community action organization instead setup its base of operations in the renovated YMCA building on Theobald Street. The historic Elks Lodge, therefore, housed several government programs, such as the seasonal farm workers program, Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA), and Youth Community Conservation and Improvement Program (YCCIP). It also later served as a cultural center and archive for the Delta Arts Project.

1110 Other writers described the floors differently; the first floor contained a reception area, classrooms, storage space and restrooms; the second floor had a reception area, a ballroom, and a kitchen; and the top floor consisted of a 150-seat theater, dressing rooms, restrooms and office space; see, Katie Nichols, “Historic Greenville building now listed,” DDT, Oct 16, 2011; Bill Johnson, “MACE Making Efforts to Preserve Town Monument,” DDT, Mar 12, 2003.
1111 The public relations office served as a public information archive, which contained information about government programs, grant requirements, job qualifications, social service referral policies, and itineraries for tours of the region’s relevant sites to MACE affiliates.
MACE established its official organ, *The Voice of SCIMPH*, in 1974 to cover newsworthy stories and provide helpful information for and about black and poor residents in the MACE impact area. Originally housed in MACE’s department of training, the newspaper served it’s twelve thousand subscribers from the public relations office in August 1977. The office kept photograph files of all MACE affiliated functions, local community leaders, affairs and concerns relevant to the residents and organizations in the Delta. The public relations department, moreover, was responsible for staging cultural events for MACE and its affiliates, utilizing locally discovered talent to offer presentations throughout the MACE community. For the educational needs of the disadvantaged people in the MACE impact area, Shalong also wanted to conduct community seminars and organize a lecture series in the arts and humanities using well-known scholars. The task of generating funds and marshalling enough resources to become self-sufficient while also developing cultural projects for disadvantaged people was a tall order for anyone in the region, much less a recent transplant from the Motor City.

In a subsequent survey of local needs in several MACE-affiliated counties, she made a few important discoveries that impelled the organization to broaden its approach to community development, raise awareness about its work on the national and international level, and reshape its popular image among African American in the Delta. First, the survey revealed that most black men, women, and children had limited or no access and exposure to conventional art forms. Consequently,” she believed, “cultural activity is practiced primarily within a vacuum [and] each different cultural sect tends to remain separate and unexposed to the others.” Most blacks in the Delta, therefore, had “limited knowledge and understanding of cultural

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diversity” and suffered from a general lack of “cultural consciousness.” It was quite common to come across adults who had never seen a play, a dance production, heard a live musical performance, seen a photo exhibit or ever been to a movie theatre. For example, Shalong explained, “you ask them what culture is and they’ll tell you ballet. You ask them if they have culture, and they’ll say no.” They did not know about the “movers and shakers” in contemporary arts, and they did not understand the “dynamic relationship between art and society, between cultural expression and human history and values.”

Even though libraries, educational institutions and cultural societies were scattered throughout the Delta, the powerful white elites designed the cultural programs and celebrations to target the more educated, affluent, and professional class of citizens. MACE did not want to import high culture for the edification of local people; nor did it hope to develop in them a pluralist cultural vision. Recognizing the desire of community members to communicate their personal, homegrown visions of the world, MACE wanted to provide an outlet for local people to share their creative activities within the community, facilitating sustained participation in community life as well as community development. The success of community arts programs, such as the Appalshop in Whitesburg, Kentucky and the Neighborhood Arts Center in Atlanta, suggested the impetus of establishing a similar program to encourage the “cultural enrichment” of affiliated black communities.

Second, the survey proffered the realization that African American in the counties served by MACE possessed specific cultural traditions and artistic forms of particular richness and

1114 Shabecoff, Neighborhoods, 61.
1115 “The MACE Delta Arts Project—Background,” in the 1980 Delta Blues Festival, subject file, Blues Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.
1116 Ibid.
value—similar to folk traditions in ethnic communities across the country. Perhaps the most significant of all, Shalong discovered, was the musical tradition “loosely termed the Delta Blues.” In one interview, Shalong describes the discovery of local, untapped resources, which the group marshalled to strengthen its community development work:

When I came on board, it wasn’t really so much of a shift as it was an emphasis on things that were being discovered. When we were down there, we were talking about, you know, ‘What is it we can do that can promote some of the natural resources that black people have in the area?’ Of course, the first thing that came to [people’s] mind was the fact that the Delta had produced so many beautiful blues musicians.\(^\text{1117}\)

The development of the blues tradition in African American communities proved a “major catalyst for popular music,” she explained. Indeed, the music of Elvis Presley and the Rolling Stones both had “deep roots” in black musical traditions. While some local musicians continued to perform the blues in its “pure form,” the majority of people living in the Delta did not regard it as a “valuable art form.”\(^\text{1118}\) Since the late 1950s, the (black) music of the Delta had earned the appreciation and admiration of professional (white) folklorists and historians, many of whom continued to document and publish their research, but most of the people surveyed failed to recognize the value of their cultural traditions, or the remaining local purveyors of the blues. Two blues musicians in Washington County, for example, James “Son” Thomas and Lil’ Bill Wallace, worked at furniture stores to support themselves, because they could not make a living off playing music so unappreciated in the Delta.

\[^{1117}\text{Karen Shalong (Morgan) Rawlins, telephone interview by T. DeWayne Moore, September 6, 2013.}\]
\[^{1118}\text{“Delta Arts Project,” initial draft, September 1977, Reel 22, Mississippi Action for Community Education (Delta Arts), general correspondence, RG 2, 1971-1980, Rockefeller Foundation Records.}\]
Over the course of the survey, Shalong recognized that the lifestyles and attitudes of some folks reflected the cultural traditions of the Delta, which suggested the blues was much more than an art form. “People walk, talk, and sing the blues,” she noticed, “day in, day out.” Drawing on the recently-published work of BBC television producer Giles Oakley called *The Devil’s Music*, which posited that blacks defined their identity in relation to white culture, themselves, and “their past,” particularly the experiences of slavery and Jim Crow, Shalong asserted:

> The fact that an enslaved people expressed their anguish through their music and continue to express their emotional reactions to life’s trials in musical forms that are Delta Blues influenced indicates that the Delta Blues tradition is not just a mere tradition in the conventional sense, but is in fact a way of life, an expression worthy of deeper psychological study, in order to determine the long range effects of racism on a people.

Since the blues had once helped black folks “absorb their misery” and “control their environment as a method of passive resistance,” Shalong wondered if the blues might serve to “avert misery and promote self-esteem, self-appreciation and self-pride” among African American in the South. The prevalence of studies, circulation of magazines, and sales of compilation records centered on blues music had increased its popularity and awareness among people across the globe, but no one had ever organized a “comprehensive centralization effort

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1120 Oakley’s important study was later cited in monographs by important black writers, such as Julio Finn, Jon Michael Spencer, and Angela Davis, see Edward Komara and Greg Johnson, *100 Books Every Blues Fan Should Own* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 18-21.

1121 Oakley believed that “the lives of all black people in America have been fundamentally shaped by the racial experience of slavery; the memory of enforced servitude in the past has molded attitudes and feelings in the present and has conditioned the black American’s stance in the world. Since the end of slavery, the black communities have been searching for their identity—in relation to white culture, in relation to themselves, and in relation to their past. And much of that search is dominated by the memory of what slavery meant. To understand the part played by the blues in American society, we need to consider the psychological impulses blacks inherited from the days of slavery, and also what cultural and artistic forms existed in those times—the spirituals, the plantation songs, banjo music, fiddle tunes and dances. All of these elements were there, and to see how and why the blues emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, we must first look at slavery society,” see, Giles Oakley, *The Devil’s Music: A History of the Blues* (London: BBC, 1976), 11; Shalong, “Delta Arts Project,” initial draft, September 1977.
designed to re-transmit this culture back to the place of origin” or made a “purposeful attempt specifically for the presentation, promulgation and further study of this American folk-life tradition.” Shalong believed that the lack of such an effort had endangered this “traditional folk-life practice indigenous to the Delta region” so much so that expressions of its “true form” were “being lost.” In line with the view of Manning Marable, a respected African American professor of political economy at Cornell University, she worried that “when we lose the blues, there will be something that will be destroyed within ourselves that speaks to our own unique humanity. If the blues dies, then a special part of our creative soul will perish along with it.”\(^{1122}\)

Shalong, a very soulful vocalist in her own right, certainly did not want the “creative soul” of blacks to vanish along with blues in the Delta. Even though several local musicians continued their roles as carriers of the blues tradition in Mississippi, the black community had largely relinquished control over its production and consumption. As former SNCC radical and griot folklorist Worth Long acknowledged:

> We don’t have any ownership or control of our culture. Now that’s a kind of slavery. So you free yourself as a citizen. See civil rights, all that was citizenship rights. Civil rights is just basic rights of the citizen, but then there are other rights. The first right is human rights. But then there are what I call creative rights, and that, within the realm of individual and collective responsibility, should belong to the community that nurtured it. And that's what [the] Delta Blues [Festival] was set up for, more than anything else. It was set up to honor, to showcase and to liberate…the musician and his or her rights within the culture.\(^{1123}\)

Having been active in the black freedom struggle since the late 1950s, Long realized the importance of developing a black consciousness that derived not from inherited (white)

meanings and racial stereotypes, but from self-definition and affirmation within the black community. He worked to further this concept of psychological liberation in the Mississippi Folklife Project, but he believed that MACE possessed the organizational structure and community support to make an even deeper, longer-lasting impact; the perpetual retransmission of beautiful black cultural traditions into the communities that, in Long’s mind, owned and nurtured them in the beginning would hasten the psychological and physical liberation of black people in the Delta.

The concept of producing exhibitions of black folk culture to help African Americans overcome self-hatred, engage the process of self-affirmation, and achieve black consciousness was neither new or revolutionary. Back in the fall of 1970, a community activist in the nation’s capital as well as later cultural consultant for MACE named Colin A. (Topper) Carew realized that blues and blues musicians had been the victims of “cultural racism,” the most insidious of three intertwined, self-perpetuating forms of racism—cultural, institutional, and individual. According to James Jones, “cultural racism” serves as the background for the development of institutional racism as well as the evolution of individual racism, or the acceptance of racist norms embedded in institutions.1124 Topper Carew experienced or witnessed all of the intertwined forms of racism while attending the Ann Arbor Blues Festival, one of the largest and most popular blues festivals. Several white students at the University of Michigan organized the event not only to pay tribute to the “originators of the blues form,” but also to provide a financial conduit to repay some of the black blues singers who had yet to benefit from the resurgence of

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interest in the genre.\textsuperscript{1125} The security guards readily allowed students from the University of Michigan backstage, yet refused to allow access to Carew. This experience led him to discount the notion that “young blacks listen only to rock or soul music.” Most African American, in fact, lacked either the means or opportunity to procure access to white-organized blues festivals.\textsuperscript{1126} Carew decided to combat “cultural racism,” therefore, with the Washington Blues Festival, the first large-scale blues fete produced by blacks and the first on a black college campus since the festival at Fort Valley State College in Georgia. Believing “the blues [had] been victimized by cultural racism,” Carew planned “to give financial and spiritual support to the artists and dispel the hold of cultural racism.”\textsuperscript{1127}

Topper Carew did not believe in art for art’s sake. He wanted to make people more aware of their presence in the world, more aware of their historical origins and the vitality of their own culture. After working with SNCC to register voters in Mississippi, Carew returned to the nation’s capital, finished his bachelor’s degree in architecture at Howard, and founded the New Thing Art and Architecture Center (NTAAC), a black cultural center located in the Adams Morgan section of Washington, D.C.\textsuperscript{1128} The original plan was to promote “community architecture” in an attempt to get some local input into neighborhood planning. In the late 1960s, Carew was commuting to Yale every week to lecture and work on his master’s degree in architecture, playing the drums on the occasional record, and raising money for the NTAAC. Carew, boasting a huge, bushy coif that he often adorned with a violet fedora teetering on top, could be seen at chic gallery openings and Kennedy Center receptions, most of the time

\textsuperscript{1127} Ibid.
surrounded by Washington D.C.’s political elite. In its peak years, the NTAAC brought in an estimated $300,000 each year from private foundations, the National Endowment for the Arts and the city.

Carew wanted to “get the music out of the hands of greedy promoters, record companies and agents, and [give it] back to the people who created it.” The record companies took advantage of black musicians, such as Arthur Crudup, who received hardly any royalties for the millions of records sold by Elvis Presley. “That’s cultural racism,” he declared, and the festival hoped to provide “financial and spiritual support to the artists and dispel [its] hold.”

Since Carew wanted the festival to “make black people more conscious of their cultural heritage,” he put together an advisory board, which included activist musician Harry Belafonte, actor Ossie Davis, innovative choreographer and author Katherine Dunham, and jazz musician Cannonball Adderly, and he persuaded Chicago journalist Ralph Metcalfe Jr., who published “The Western African Roots of Afro-American Music” earlier that year in Black Scholar, to emcee all three days of the festival.

Due to the popularity of soul music, black reluctance to recall the hardships of Jim Crow, and ticket distribution problems, however, the three night crowd total of 3,700 people was made up largely of whites, which elicited Metcalfe’s comments about “making this thing blacker” in the future. “Shouting that the ‘blues’ belonged to black people and that they resented the high price of admission and the large number of honkies present,” several African American students resorted to ripping off the tickets of whites to gain entrance to the 1,500 seat Cramton

Auditorium. “Small knots of students and non-students” beat on the auditorium doors throughout the concert in protest of “their failure to get tickets.” “This is black music,” taunted the all-black groups outside the venue, “Why do those whites from Georgetown get all the privileges?” Carew’s foray into concert promotion was largely misinterpreted and unsupported by the black community. Though he planned to organize additional “black happenings” and make the festival an annual event, he did not organize a follow up festival. White producers dominated blues festivals into the late 1970s, when MACE once again hoped to help African Americans regain control over the staging and presentation of the blues.

To preserve the more “traditional,” or “dying,” forms of the blues as well as return control to the black communities that supported its emergence, Shalong proposed that MACE establish a new cultural division called the Delta Arts Project (DAP) as early as March 1977. More than anything else, the project sought to correct some of the misconceptions about black culture and increase awareness and appreciation of the heritage of common people and the significance of grassroots traditions. Even though the organization had never initiated such a program, it maintained a commitment to providing local people the education and skills to enrich their communities. Shortly after the arrival of Shalong, the organization initiated a pilot program of the arts project with minimal funding to develop a list of experimental programs related to cultural development including lectures, workshops, and courses in the blues tradition, martial arts, dance, fashion modeling, visual art, and the outside world of cultural pluralism. “To couch all of these efforts,” she wanted MACE establish an arts division to serve as an “umbrella” for “anything we did with the arts.” While the mission of the DAP came to focus on setting up a

cultural resource center for the preservation of the blues, Shalong initially focused on the organization of several “local festivals” in affiliate counties, which allowed “locally discovered talent the opportunity for exposure” and celebrated a series of political victories, community programs, and the expansion of black economic power.  

**THE TALLAHATCHIE COUNTY UNION FOR PROGRESS & THE AFFILIATES**

The arts and cultural program of MACE organized its first local festival to promote the membership drive and educational efforts of one of its newest affiliates, the Tallahatchie County Union for Progress (TCUP). Infamous for the lynchings of Emmitt Till and Clinton Melvin in the mid-1950s, Tallahatchie County experienced a debilitating level of black out-migration and contributed mightily to the almost three hundred thousand African Americans who fled the state during the 1960s. In 1941, the Farm Security Administration (FSA) had purchased three plantations, divided them into tracts, and established one of its last and largest black-owned farming communities known as Tallahatchie Farms. It remained broken up into small, mostly black-owned farms in the early 1970s, when Roosevelt Williams became the first African American elected to the county school board. He also established the Tallahatchie County Farm Cooperative, which helped small farmers purchase supplies at lower prices and offered technical assistance in hopes of stabilizing the local economy. Williams noticed that “more and more” blacks were “coming back to Mississippi” in the 1970s, and some were “not even leaving in the

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first place,” such as Fay Fleming, the cooperative’s eighteen-year-old bookkeeper. Eugene Carter, who had attended Helen Hancock Junior College in Santa Maria, California and worked in several northern cities, returned home after his father died in an automobile accident and took over the family farm in Philipp, a small hamlet on the Yazoo River in the southwestern section of Tallahatchie County. “It’s clean, it’s beautiful and its home,” he declared during his failed bid for a legislative seat in 1971, and it “could be the greatest place on earth to live” if blacks could win the “battle for dignity and self-sufficiency.”

In 1969, Carter became a trainer for MACE, assisting in the organization of the Sunflower County Union for Progress and the Leflore County Voter’s League, but he left the organization the following year to help register voters in Tallahatchie County. With the help of Lucy Mae Boyd, director of the local chapter of the NAACP, Carter organized high school students to canvass local communities as well as protest the elimination of certain school activities and extensive busing between Allen Carver and East Tallahatchie High Schools. Even after several unsuccessful campaigns for public office, he did not give up organizing in the black communities. In mid-October 1976, Carter enlisted the support of Lucy Mae Boyd, as well as several other local leaders, and filed the incorporation papers for TCUP, which established a unified front of community organizations to take back control of the county. The organization adopted the slogan of William Clay, the first black congressman from Missouri: “It is time for blacks to remember we have no permanent enemies, no permanent friends, just permanent

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1138 In the new millennium, Tallahatchie Farms remained broken up into small, mostly black-owned landholdings, but only a few owners were active farmers. A group of multitenants created large operations by renting small tracts from several owners to achieve economies of scale to support large inventories of machinery such as tractors, harvesters, combines, as well as equipment for planting, plowing, and spraying; see, Richard L. Nostrand, Lawrence E. Estaville, Homelands: A Geography of Culture and Place across America.


1140 Charleston police arrested 125 young black students and jailed them at Parchman; see, “Penny Jenkins, “125 Arrested in Tallahatchie,” DDT, Oct 21, 1970, p.20.
interests.”

As president of TCUP, Eugene Carter encouraged “all members of the community”—white and black, young and old—“to work together” to combat community deterioration, foster economic growth, and promote the social welfare of distressed and underprivileged people in the county. According to B.K. Mitchell, in one monthly spotlight column for *The Voice*, Carter was the “initiating force” in the development of several programs focused on educating local youths about black history, including a larger project to establish a “Black History Library.” In support of his efforts, MACE organized a “Black Folk Festival” and membership drive at the New Town Church in Charleston on Sunday, March 13, 1977.

In addition to the musical stylings of the Mississippi Aires, a gospel group from Memphis, the newly-elected mayor of Mayersville Unita Blackwell delivered an inspiring speech about her visionary achievements in rural Issaquena County.

While the initial promotional event of the pilot project featured only the standard inspirational modes of oratory and gospel music, MACE branched out and established positive relationships with other local musicians. In April 1977, Shalon and Bannerman used the facilities at Fine Vines to manufacture new uniforms for the eighteen piece Parchman Prison Band, a recently integrated musical group with an intriguing history so reflective of the earlier, yet enduring, segregation of sound.

Back in the spring of 1960, the prison farm hired its first

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1144 In February 1975, the Humphreys County Union for Progress held its annual membership and co-op day, which featured a “moving rendition” of “We Shall Overcome” by the Humphreys High School Band performing and Ernest White related the history of HCUP. Rebecca Dennis and Wiletta Clayborn spoke about the advantages of membership in the organization, highlighting the impact of food stamps and welfare. The Voices of Heaven, of Belzoni, and the Chuck Berry Singers of Greenville entertained the crowd with gospel singing. Charles Evers, in his keynote address, advised black youths to stay in school, urged black ministers “to activate their congregations to register and vote.” With over sixty percent of the population black, Humphreys County should have elected black officials; see, “Evers Urges Black to Get Together,” *VOS* (Feb-Mar 1975), p.4.
musical director, Wendell Cannon, a musician and former campaign manager for Ross Barnett.1146 “Up until then,” one observer recalled, “the music was out in the fields,” but the work songs “quieted down” soon after Cannon put together “two orchestras” of mostly former professionals—a white country band called the Insiders and a black rhythm and blues group, the Star Dusters.1147 Each group rehearsed twice a week in the same space, which allowed them to learn from one another, and they performed for a weekly radio program as well as different prison camps during the week. The Star Dusters, which often performed for weekend dances in Greenville venues, such as the American Legion Home, the National Guard Armory, and the Moose Lodge,1148 featured talented musicians and delivered energetic live performances, as one writer described:

The [all-black] orchestra was taken to the woman’s camp for a concert and the program set off jitterbugging among the inmates. There was jazz, rock ‘n roll, hillbilly selections and blues. There were songs by male and female quartets, a performance by a tap-dancer and some furious drumming by a youngster who was convicted for stealing a set of drums.1149

Cannon also supervised the prison’s baseball leagues, and he believed that “sports and music are the most efficient tools of integration, racially as well as culturally.” In the mid-1970s, therefore, he desegregated the two bands, brought dancers over from the women’s prison, and consolidated the line-up of drums, horns, and guitars into one group, the Parchman Prison Band.1150

1147 “Convict Musicians ‘Rocking’ Parchman,” DDT, June 12, 1960, p.16.
1149 “Convict Musicians ‘Rocking’ Parchman,” DDT, June 12, 1960, p.16.
1150 Cannon’s daughter, who worked for the parole service then, listed their styles like an index of the American pop songbook: country, blues, fifties rock, reggae, disco, funk, and sentimental all made it on their set list. Playing everything from Kenny Rogers and “Lionel Richie to Conway Twitty,” she noted, the group eventually transitioned into “a stage band,” which even recorded three albums. His daughter sang with them and wrote several songs for the group, which finally disbanded with her father’s death in 1996; see, Stephen Wade, Music in American Life:
Beginning in 1974, Cannon made the integrated group available to civic groups and festivals in cities across the state, such as the Mississippi Delta Junior College Homecoming in Moorhead, the Rosedale Bicentennial Celebration, the Biloxi Port Celebration, and the Mainstream Festival in Greenville. In March 1976, the Saenger Theatre in Hattiesburg billed the band as part of a “family night of entertainment,” even though the spirited group’s repertoire included many familiar disco, rock ‘n roll, and blues tunes. MACE regularly printed the soul-searching letters and testimonials of inmates at Parchman in *The Voice*, many of which discussed the circumstances that led to the imprisonment of African Americans. Due to its sympathetic stance concerning the plight of the incarcerated men and women at the state penitentiary, MACE supported the talented musicians in the Parchman Prison Band, which featured prominently at several promotional events as well as tradition of harvest celebrations at black-owned farm cooperatives.

**The Delta MACE-Aires and Celebrations of Black Political Power**

The significant growth of black political power in Mississippi provided a host of opportunities for MACE not only to organize local festivals and celebrations, but also provide leadership training for young, inexperienced officials. In December 1977, one report from the Joint Center of Political Studies recorded a dramatic forty percent increase in black elected officials across the state, rising over the past year from 210 to 295. Six new black mayors, including two women, had also been elected in Mississippi cities, as well as nine incumbents,

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bringing the total to fifteen—the largest number in any state.\textsuperscript{1152} Many of the electoral successes stemmed from a federal court ruling that eliminated discriminatory election practices for municipal governing boards; the courts found “at-large” municipal elections indefensible and unconstitutional in at least forty-five cities and ordered the installation of “by-ward” elections for seats on the city council. By providing training and technical support to newly-elected black politicians in several small towns, MACE hoped to compensate for their lack of experience in local governance. MACE also helped usher in the new order of things by organizing the inauguration celebrations of black officials in the Delta. Similar to the attraction of festivals in Fayette, the educational conferences and public festivities proved an attractive platform for state and local politicians to reach across the racial divide and engage the cultural initiatives of MACE.

Most nineteenth century Mississippi towns, similar to scores of other municipalities across the country, operated under a district-based election system, in which the voters of each district, or ward, elected a council member to represent their interests. In the early twentieth century, however, a progressive city plan spread across the state. Powerful business leaders and urban progressives advocated the progressive commission form of city government. The voters inside the city elected commissioners at-large—not from specific districts. Having originated in Galveston, Texas, the at-large system promised to reduce corruption and promote good government, but its adoption all but eliminated the political influence of racial and ethnic minorities.\textsuperscript{1153} The professional and business interests of other cities in Texas, the deep South, and the Midwest, therefore, soon installed the at-large commission system to gain political

control and disfranchise African Americans and other ethnic groups, whose political influence came from ward voting. By the time the push for municipal election reform reached the Magnolia State, the Mississippi Constitution of 1890 had all but totally disfranchised black Mississippians. Yet, officials in state and local government maintained no aversion to reinforcement of disfranchisement mechanisms, adopting the poll tax, literacy tests, residency requirements, and later the all-white primary. The at-large commission form of government served as yet another impediment to black political power. When the city of Greenville conducted a municipal referendum to either retain its at-large voting system or change to ward voting in 1906, powerful Delta legislator J. L. Hebron warned the attendees of one meeting that ward elections were tantamount to “bringing the negro back into politics.”

In the 1950s, a state statute required cities with a population of over 10,000 to elect six aldermen by wards and one from the municipality at large. Smaller municipalities, under the same statute, with less than 10,000 residents could decide whether to elect all five aldermen using at-large voting or elect four of them using ward voting and one at-large. The state legislature substantially altered the aldermanic election statute, however, through annotation in the 1962 legislative session. Out of their belief in white supremacy, it mandated at-large elections for all posts in all municipalities of all sizes. It served as a serious impediment to the election of black candidates after the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, and several black registered voters in the cities of Macon, Moss Point, Starkville and West Point challenged the constitutionality of at-large elections in 1975. In Stewart v. Waller, the plaintiffs argued that the state’s intentional and malicious inclusion of the annotated section (21-3-7) in 1962 violated the 14th and 15th amendments, discriminating against black voters in municipal elections and diluting

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black voting strength, which significantly reduced the success of black candidates.\footnote{Gen. Laws of Miss., ch.491§36 (1950). Miss. Code Ann. § 3374-36 (1942). 404 F. Supp. 206 (N.D. Miss. 1975)} Confronted with an abundance of evidence, the district court found the section (21-3-7) unconstitutional and declared it “null and void,” forcing thirty cities to immediately adopt ward voting plans.\footnote{“Election Law Ruling Causes Confusion,” DDT, July 20, 1975, p.3.} Twelve subsequent lawsuits forced even more cities to adopt ward voting. The conditional elimination of at-large voting not only made it possible for blacks to win more seats on the city council but also encouraged aspiring black politicians to enter the political arena and secure confident victories.\footnote{Twenty-two of the twenty-six largest cities in Mississippi held at-large city council elections in 1965. Over the next twenty-five years, most of the cities changed to district-based voting systems. By the end of the 1970s, the number of black city council members increased an estimated 135 percent, going from 61 in 1974 to 143 in 1979. The resistance to eliminating at-large voting systems was strongest in the largest cities in Mississippi. Greenville, Greenwood, Jackson and Hattiesburg fought to retain at-large elections until the mid-1980s, when the amendment of section two of the Voting Rights Act outlawed such electoral systems; see, Chandler Davidson and Bernard Grofman, Quiet Revolution in the South: The Impact of the Voting Rights Act, 1965-1990 (Princeton University Press, 1994), 146.}

The inauguration celebration of black elected officials in the city of Shaw served as a coming out party for the Delta MACE-Aires, a rousing trio of gospel singers, in July 1977. The group consisted of three women—K. Shalong Morgan, Lois Magee Steward, and Rosie Smith—who met through their respective positions at MACE, and developed as a promotational tool for its development initiatives. Smith, an attractive 23 year-old Greenville-native, started working as a secretary about the same time that K. Shalong Morgan came on board. Having graduated from Alcorn State University, where she was an active member of the Black Cultural Society and received recognition as an accomplished vocalist, Smith came to embrace the “philosophy of purpose” at MACE. By helping to achieve its community development goals, she came to view promoting economic growth as “one of the greatest missions in the world.” She eagerly used her vocals skills to promote the important work of MACE and the Delta Foundation.
Lois Magee was not only the most experienced of the three employees, she was also the most influential member of the gospel group. Hailing from St. Paul, Minnesota, where she learned to play piano as a child, Magee graduated from Central High School. Though she became a licensed practical nurse, got married, had children, and “settled down to being a housewife,” her marriage had fallen apart by the fall of 1968, and she moved to Greenville “to make a new life” as a clerical worker for Systematic Training and Redevelopment (STAR), an experimental War on Poverty program designed to train and relocate unemployed adults to regions in need of unskilled and semi-skilled labor.\(^{1158}\) Similar to other state-controlled anti-poverty initiatives, STAR increasingly disregarded the voices of black and poor people regarding its administration, according to STAR board member and DM director Owen Brooks, who recruited Magee to come work for the DM once it fell apart.\(^{1159}\) She also received crucial experience in community development in a brief stint with the Delta Housing Development Corporation (DHDC), a non-profit “self-help housing organization” for the rural poor which originated in relief efforts following tornadoes in the early seventies that devastated black communities in Sunflower County.\(^{1160}\) Magee really started to shine, however, after accepting a membership clerk position with MACE in November 1973. It was not long before she earned a seat on the MACE Organizing Council, which appointed her the founding editor of the organization’s monthly newspaper, *The Voice of SCIMPH*, in December 1974.\(^{1161}\) Since the

\(^{1158}\) Operated by the Roman Catholic diocese of Mississippi, STAR established training centers in Carthage, Philadelphia, Meridian, Yazoo City, Greenwood, and Greenville, which recruited six thousand families for the relocation and employment program in its initial four years; see, “Trial Project will Re-Locate Mississippians,” *BRA*, July 5, 1966, p.30.

\(^{1159}\) Lois Magee and Austin Taylor, of the DM, were listed as the incorporators of Mound Bayou Cycle Products, which manufactured and distributed bicycle products with financial assistance of the BERC; see, “Charters,” *DDT*, Sep 17, 1972, p.2; see also, “Antipoverty Program Under Fire,” *BRA*, Nov 29, 1970, p.32.


early 1970s, in addition, Magee had been organizing and promoting gospel music performances at the House of Prayer Tabernacle in Greenville.\textsuperscript{1162} She organized concerts that featured such gospel groups as Madame Wiggly, the King Temple Church of God in Christ Choir of Memphis, the Faith Temple Church of God in Christ Choir of Pine Bluff, Arkansas, the Spiritualairs of Helena, Arkansas, as well as local favorites, the Chuck Berry Singers.\textsuperscript{1163} By combining her musical and writing talents with her promotional abilities, Magee served as the driving promotional and organizational force behind the future success of the singing group, and she also developed into one of the most widely known and influential women on staff at MACE/Delta.

The Delta Mace-Aires made their debut performance in celebration of black political victories over the summer in Shaw, a small town in Bolivar County. The inaugural program reflected a local reverence for the spirit of the CRM as well as the militant attitude of the BPM. Gregory Lamar Flippins, a stocky, well-spoken and energetic young man, defeated his incumbent white opponent to become the first black mayor of the city in June 1977. Raised by his grandfather, a handyman, in a part of town that locals referred to as “across the bayou,” he came of age in the wake of struggles for civil rights. He grew up in Bolivar County and graduated from Delta State College, where he received an acute education on the inhumane role of white supremacy in shaping the Delta. “I don’t ever want to forget about slavery, about segregation,” Flippins later asserted, “We were brought here to be bought and used as labor. We were counted as three-fifths—takes two to make a whole. I don’t forget this.”\textsuperscript{1164} Unwilling to silence the unsettling history of segregation and slavery, he experienced a host of problems with

\textsuperscript{1162} The first evidence of Magee promoting a gospel concert was in August 1972; see, “Church Sponsors Gospel Singing,” \textit{DDT}, Aug 6, 1972, p.12.


local whites due to his vocal and unrestrained shaming of racist whites. In one of his first official acts as mayor, Flippins promised to work hard and turn Shaw into “the shining star of the Delta.” The inauguration of the newly-elected town officials attracted a crowd of about three hundred, mostly black, citizens to Shaw’s City Hall in early July. As free-lance photographers and a CBS News crew took their positions around the flat-bed trailer sitting out front, one local reverend blessed the new leaders of the city and local singers Wilma and Carolyn Curry led the crowd in singing the black national anthem, “Lift Every Voice and Sing.” In the wake of the stirring rendition, a nine-year old girl climbed up on the trailer and “dynamically delivered” an excerpt from Dr. King’s famous “I Have a Dream” speech.

While the early portion of the program invoked the religious concept of perseverance and the utopian visions of a monolithic advocate of non-violent direct action, the musical portion of the program revealed the cultural education imperatives of MACE. One writer for The Voice reported the subsequent musical performance of guitarist Leon Pinson and longtime civil rights activist Amzie Moore, one of the three original founding board members of MACE. The writer

1165 Shaw alderman Davis Burns defeated Flippins in the second Democratic primary for mayor in 1973, but he remained a vocal agent in local politics; he launched a successful protest of the first Democratic primary for alderman due to problems with voting machines. In 1974, Flippins made a persuasive case against changing the chief of police from an elected to an appointed position, a move that the US Justice Department later found to be discriminatory. As a mayoral candidate in the first Democratic primary of May 1977, Flippins was watching the polling places when a photographer for the Bolivar Commercial started taking his photograph; believing the pictures might wind up in the hands of the Ku Klux Klan, he grabbed the arm of the young white woman and took the film, which led to his arrest on assault charges. It was “absurd,” Greenville defense attorney Victor McTeer argued, that “the state of Mississippi [was] trying a black man for touching a white woman’s arm,” and the county court jury subsequently acquitted him after deliberating for only twenty minutes. Having been harassed and received threats over the phone, the first black mayor of the town had problems getting the white community to support his programs. In addition to being saddled with the financial responsibility of providing adequate municipal services to black residents, which the previous all-white administration never fulfilled, the town had a serious need for jobs; welfare was the second highest source of income after agriculture, and the city lacked an adequate tax base to provide matching funds for federal grants and public works projects; “Ex-mayor Beats Mayor,” DDT, May 16, 1973, p.10; “Shaw Alderman Primary Voided,” DDT, May 17, 1973, p.10; “Police Chief: Shaw Applies for Change,” DDT, Sep 1, 1974, p.16; “Shaw Mayor Acquitted of Assault,” DDT, Sep 30, 1977, p.1; “State’s Black Mayors Bemoan Poor Conditions in Rural Towns,” South (Biloxi) Mississippi Sun, Nov 1, 1977, p.10.

described the two men as “two longtime Deltans known from the Mississippi River to the Alabama State Line,” who performed “traditional blues music of the Delta variety.” The two men, however, did not play the blues; in fact, they believed the impression absurd. In one interview, Pinson flatly refuted the notion, declaring, “I have never played the blues. I don’t sing ‘em, I don’t play ‘em, and I don’t have ‘em.” He had never even tried “to play…blues or rock and roll.” The writer’s errant reporting is understandable, however, especially considering that the elder musician used a knife as a slide, tuned his guitar very low, and played chord-connecting runs that featured commonly in both blues and country music. Pinson’s guitar playing sounded so much like blues, according to a couple of state employees, that folklorists and enthusiasts dubbed his musical style the “holy blues” or “gospel blues.” The only recognizable difference, in fact, was that the lyrics of the songs were sacred—not secular. The music of Pinson and Moore, nevertheless, emphasized the similarities between blues and gospel, particularly their common historical foundations in the black freedom struggle.

A biographical sketch of Leon Pinson reveals a more extensive relationship between community-based musicians, some of whom later found a measure of fame in the wider festival world, and the organizing traditions that buttressed civil rights activism. Born in Union County on January 11, 1919, he grew up playing piano in the church, adhering to a strict repertoire of gospel and spiritual music. Having been left crippled in one leg and almost blind from a bout with meningitis as a youth, he supported himself primarily through musical performance, “going from place to place singing and playing at churches and different places” around his north

1168 Alan Young, Woke Me Up This Morning: Black Gospel Singers and the Gospel Life (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 37.
1169 Ibid., 32.
Mississippi home in New Albany. He never held down a steady job, which allowed him to travel and perform in cities as far away as Memphis, St. Louis, Chicago, and Racine, Wisconsin, where he purchased his first electric guitar. In the early 1960s, he moved to Bolivar County and started to perform at musical engagements outside his “regular round of church-related work,” such as the political rallies of the Bolivar County Voters League and the meetings of SNCC.

“This middle-aged blind person carrying his amplifier through town playing on the street was in the movement,” folklorist Worth Long recalled, “He had a movement consciousness [and] he played for mass meetings.” His traditional gospel repertoire and increasing presence at civil rights meetings also brought him together with veteran civil rights leader Amzie Moore, who performed with him at local festivals and other MACE-sponsored events in the late 1970s. Not too much of a blues singer, Moore travelled the rural countryside beginning in the fifties singing in a gospel quartet, the Four Gate Harmonizers, and signing people up to join the NAACP. In his opinion, the passionate performance of gospel music helped him find the “courage and strength to live” in such an oppressive society. Pinson expressed a similar sentiment.

“Gospel is uplifting [and] if you’re saved,” he declared, “you don’t have [any] need of the blues.”

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1171 In the mid-twentieth century, Pinson was a member of groups such the Silvertone Quartet in New Albany, and he also performed with harmonicist Elder Roma Wilson in Arkansas during the late 1940s; see, Alan Young, *Woke Me Up This Morning: Black Gospel Singers and the Gospel Life* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 35, 23.

1172 “League to Meet,” *DDT*, June 24, 1974, p.25.

1173 Though never a recording star, Pinson earned a local reputation and later attracted the attention of folklorists and music enthusiasts, many of whom visited the Delta in search of the “authentic” musical descendants of pre-World War II recording stars. Beginning in 1974, he travelled to the nation’s capital three years in a row to perform at the Festival of American Folklife; see, Worth Long, “Cultural Organizing and Participatory Research,” in *The Arts of Black Folk* (New York: Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, 1991) p. 32.

1174 Hogan, *Man Minds One Heart*, p.95; Reverend Sammie Rash, interview conduct by Mike Garvey, March 30, 1977, Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage of The University of Southern Mississippi.

1175 “Singing convention at Rosedale, Mississippi,” tape recording 10 notes, Amzie Moore Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Library-Archives Division.

The mostly black crowd at the inauguration celebration, according to the same reviewer for *The Voice*, did not respond well to the “gospel blues” of Pinson and Moore. The lackluster reception of their more traditional, secular-sounding music foreshadowed the future opposition of some black folks to the blues-focused efforts of MACE, but the subsequent and well-received vocal harmonies of the Delta Mace-Aires raised the spirits of all in attendance. It being their first show, the group had only planned “to do a couple of songs,” one of the members revealed modestly, but the crowd thoroughly enjoyed the “more uplifting…gospel flavor” of the threesome singing group, whose inspired performance left “the crowd…enthusiastic, excited, and ready” for the ensuing speeches of several guest speakers. After being sworn in as mayor, Flippins delivered his inauguration speech, calling on former residents to return and contribute to the future development of Shaw. Unita Blackwell made another appearance and relayed the benefits of incorporating the town of Mayersville, and Charles Bannerman delivered a confident message of “incentive and hope” concerning the historic election of such an energetic and “young” politician. He also tempered his celebratory tone by emphasizing how much important work remained undone. While he certainly delighted in witnessing the “new strides” of African American, he also stressed that “each new step brings about another and another” and implored “we must keep on keeping on.”

His final words rang true for the Delta Mace-Aires, whose welcome reception at Shaw encouraged the threesome to continue their musical collaboration and expand on the cultural initiatives of MACE. Intending to deliver a one-time performance in a supporting role to seasoned movement veterans Pinson and Moore, the group “stayed together” due to the huge positive reaction to their performance in Shaw. After the trio performed at “pretty much all the

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1178 Ibid.
local churches in the Delta,” including St. Matthew AME Church on Nelson Street, they realized
the impetus of defining the group’s mission. Moving forward, they wanted the gospel singing
of the group to inspire a sense of hope for the future, serve as a promotional vehicle in
celebration of the social, political, and economic programs of MACE, and impart a sense of pride
in the progressive accomplishments of black communities in the Delta. “The initial concept was
that not only were we gospel singers,” Shalong informed, “but we were also helping to promote
MACE and the Delta Foundation—that’s what we represented.” The Delta Mace-Aires also
came to signify “the fact that the Delta Foundation and MACE were supporters of not just blues
music but gospel music as well [and] saw them both as specifically American music that were
born out of the experiences of black people.” It was Shalong’s efforts to support both secular
and spiritual musical traditions that defined her legacy at MACE.

The Delta-Mace Aires revealed its religious mission in one feature article in The Voice.
Hoping to “sing praises to the Lord and to do His will,” one member explained, “we just want to
help somebody through the messages in our songs, then we know our work is not in vain.” With
accompaniment on piano and tambourine, one writer insisted that the Delta Mace-Aires ignited a
“fire” of “inspiration to those who hear them” sing in the style of “Ye Ole Time Religion.”

The threesome performed old spiritual hymns such as “Down By the Riverside,” “Take Me to
the Water,” “Lord, I’ll Go,” and “We’ve Come This Far by Faith.” Coming out of African and
African-American experiences of worship, dance, improvisation, and—above all—the religious
syncretism that occurred during slavery, most of the songs in their repertoire had roots in the
hopes and faith of a community struggling to find its way in a strange land—in the belief that

"God has brought us through so much already; we can be sure He will continue to do so."

Hoping to use its music to encourage people to believe in the ultimate justice of life, the Delta Mace-Aires recorded a series of live performances at WABG-TV in Greenwood, which broadcast each Sunday for thirteen weeks. In almost no time, Shalong remembered, “We were definitely pretty popular.”

The successful completion of projects also offered the Delta-Mace Aires opportunities to pursue its goal for promoting the cultural programs of MACE. In their respective roles at MACE, the threesome believed that promoting community development programs, helping raise funds for the poor, and building memberships in the local affiliates in many ways fulfilled their duties to see His will done. In August 1977, one of the oldest affiliates, the Madison County Union for Progress (MCUP) organized the grand open house celebration at Pride Gardens Recreational Complex (PGRC), adjacent to one of the last fully-subsidized, low-income housing projects in the nation. After purchasing thirty acres of land outside of Flora, MACE incorporated Delta Real Estate Development (DRED) in August 1974 to manage the construction of the large housing project, which included thirty-two three-bedroom units, twenty four-bedroom, sixteen two-bedroom, and eight one bedroom units, and represented the successful cooperation of the Public Works Division of the Department of Commerce, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the National Corporation of Housing Partnerships (NHP), the Presbyterian Economic Development Corporation (PEDCO), the Opportunity Funding Cooperation (OFC), several major local commercial lending institutions, and the Ford Foundation, the last of which provided a one million dollar participation, insured loan in conjunction with a local mortgage

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company. After completing the housing complex in less than two years, DRED constructed a community center and recreational complex with a baseball diamond, basketball courts, swimming pool, as well as picnic and boating areas. Delta Management, Inc., a for-profit subsidiary of the Delta Foundation tasked with operating the new housing and entertainment structures, joined forces with MCUP to promote the rental availability of the newly-opened recreational complex for banquets, workshops, clinics, retreats, lectures, tournaments, exhibits, and festivals.

On the “fun-filled day” of the grand open house celebration, one witness reported, “it seemed as if a hundred things were going on at once,” as children and adults frolicked in the swimming pool, played basketball, and tried their hand at riding horses. Inside the six thousand square foot structure, some of the attendees played games, browsed the various displays setup by minority businesses, and danced to the music of two record spinners from Canton. Attracting as many as eight hundred people from as far away as Greenville, Rolling Fork, Sardis, and Batesville, the entertainment started off with a fashion show by the Jahari Models, who delighted the crowd with original fashions from designers in Jackson. Suma Diarra and Ceca, a black dance troupe from New Orleans, presented dance and poetry derived from the heritage traditions of different ethnic groups in Africa, and the gospel flavor flowed from the Delta MACE-Aires, who concluded the festivities with a host of familiar gospel songs. By promoting the “social welfare of the distressed and underprivileged, lessening the burdens of government and combating community deterioration,” MCUP had established the nearby Community Pride

1185 “Housing Project,” DDT, Nov 15, 1974, p.8;
Supermarket in Flora as well as the Ebony Group Office, attracting a sizable membership of three thousand people in its eight year history.\textsuperscript{1188}

In its decade-long existence, MACE had almost always located its headquarters in Greenville. The founding board members of the organization, however, wanted to maintain a low profile in the Queen City, and they focused most of their efforts on the core counties—not on a local affiliate in Washington County. At the same time the organization’s attitude about its public image began to shift, a group of eight housewives concerned with the growing energy crisis set their minds “to do something about it.” The local women, believing that folks failed to grasp the dire nature of the energy shortage, founded Housewives United, which conducted a door-to-door organizing and education campaign and held energy conservation clinics to raise awareness and promote a community-wide effort to conserve energy in early 1977.\textsuperscript{1189} The group’s programs were a proving ground for its talented and passionate leader, Joan Brown, a social outreach advocate at Kindling Star M.B. Church who developed into quite a versatile community organizer.\textsuperscript{1190} She also fought hard to counteract the culture of poverty theory.\textsuperscript{1191} In a letter to the editor in March, Brown complained about the rudeness of the women at the welfare office as well as the stigma attached to those food stamp recipients, “relegated to the pale of

\textsuperscript{1188} Larry Adams, of Greenville, became the new manager of the store in the summer of 1977. After receiving his bachelor’s degree in business administration at DSC in 1973, he worked in Detroit for a couple of years before moving into Pride Gardens, the LTD housing complex constructed in 1974; see, B.K. Mitchell, “Flora Community Pride Store Gets New manager,” \textit{VOS}, July 1977, p.3.


\textsuperscript{1191} Early proponents of the theory, citing the aspirations and character of children who had grown up in poverty, argued that the poor developed behavior that often perpetuated poverty. The concept of “blaming-the-victim” led other scholars to conclude that institutions of exclusion created and perpetuated the cycle of poverty in America. The culture of poverty theory remains attractive in political circles, despite its largely invalid intellectual status; see, Oscar Lewis, "Culture of Poverty,” in \textit{On Understanding Poverty: Perspectives from the Social Sciences}, ed. Daniel P. Moynihan (New York: Basic Books, 1969), 199; Michael Harrington, \textit{The Other America: Poverty in the United States} (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1962); Carol B. Stack, \textit{All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community} (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).


Joan Brown soon caught the attention of Charles Bannerman, who signed her up in the leadership development program. By mobilizing her grassroots supporters in Greenville and relying on institutional support from MACE, she established the first affiliate of the community action group in Greenville—The Washington County Union for Progress (WCUP)—and she setup shop at the old Greenville Industrial College and went to work identifying and addressing the needs of poor African Americans. One of its programs, for example, offered elderly and handicapped people who lived outside the city free transportation to doctor’s offices, public assistance offices, drug stores, and grocery stores. In August 1977, MACE celebrated the establishment of the local affiliate by organizing a “Big Gospel-Rama” at the First Baptist Church in Greenville. Featuring the gospel sounds of the Chuck Berry Singers, the Gospel Melodaires, the Junioraires, and the Delta Mace-Aires, the local affiliate crowned its first Little Miss and Little Mister WCUP during the celebration.

In mid-September, the Delta MACE-Aires performed at the extravagant inauguration ceremonies of the new mayor of Tchula in Holmes County. Held in honor of dedicated local civil rights activist Hartman Turnbow, the large celebration attracted several state and local politicians, including Governor Cliff Finch, Fayette Mayor Charles Evers, former gubernatorial candidate John Arthur Eaves, and county supervisor B.T. Taylor, as well as a crowd of a couple hundred people to one of the small town’s parking lots. The festivities continued with an
impressive concert lineup in the local gymnasium. Bobby “Chicken Head” Rush entertained the audience first with his “provocative torso movements and sexy manner,” Little Milton “wooed and cooed the attentive audience in his usual imitable style,” and the headlining Staples Singers “brought the house down” at the end.  

The public image of MACE was low-profile, honest, and tough. The community action group underwent an audit on an almost yearly basis in the 1970s, and the leaders of such groups as the Delta Ministry and MACE expected increased government scrutiny if not an audit every year. Regardless of the spotlights on Bannerman and other leaders, MACE soon set its sights a bit higher than social gatherings. In 1978, K. Shalong Morgan submitted a proposal for a major festival and a cultural institute to be headquartered in Greenville.

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Sterling Brown did not consider *Blues People* a “good book on the blues.” It demonstrated that the author, in fact, knew very little about the earliest recorded blues artists. Amiri Baraka leaves out not only the “old blues singers,” but also “the later crop of blues singers.” Due to his dismissal of artists such as Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith, Lonnie Johnson and Jelly Roll Morton, who “are the blues,” Brown did not learn anything about the blues from Baraka. He believed, however, that “it’s a kind of declaratory book in which he’s making a statement for a certain kind of freedom” for black artists and his “instincts are sound in much of the book.” Brown understood well the historical imperatives out of which Ron Karenga and Amiri Baraka derived the “literature as propaganda” argument. It was the critical genius, in fact, of Brown which first recognized that the blues, while reflective of the historical context of its existence, also “dialectically helped, in its own fashion, to resist that history.”

It all came together for Long under the brief tutelage of perhaps the most eloquent shaper of minds of the civil rights era, a man who connected some of the most radical young freedom fighters to a more usable understanding of the African American past.

Worth Long made it his mission to personally emphasize the elements of resistance in the blues at almost every opportunity, and MACE was not married to the hollow promotion of the

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1197 It also revealed his unabashed preference for avant-garde music, which has little to do with the blues or with “blues people.” Ornette Coleman; and other avant-garde musicians frankly appealed to a very small number of people; see, Charles H. Rowell and Sterling A. Brown,” "Let Me Be with Ole Jazzbo": An Interview with Sterling A. Brown,” *Callaloo* 21:4 (Autumn 1998): 789-809.
blues so much as they were the education of the black community about the blues. By creating its
cultural arm and helping its members gain a better understanding of the blues, specifically its
intrinsic relationship with the African American experience, the board of directors at MACE
wanted its affiliates and members to develop a positive self-image to contradict the stereotypical,
negative depictions of the blues and black folks in the Delta. If the new Delta Arts Program
could incite massive community action for education, Long believed that the long-term operation
of the program would result in nothing short of revolution.

In mid-September 1978, Alan Lomax stood in front of three dozen people gathered for a
press conference in Greenville at the Central Avenue home of Vance Nimrod, manager of
technical services and special projects for the Delta Foundation. Having recently finished
working with Worth Long on the documentary film, The Last Where the Blues Began, he showed
to up to legitimize the announcement of the first ever Delta Blues Festival:

Blues have reached out all over the world. It’s known in Japan, Tokyo, Australia
and Berlin. It’s the rage in Britain and the basis of rock and roll, which has
produced a billion-dollar industry. And here are its makers, right down on Nelson
Street, and in Leland and in Hollandale and in Senatobia and in Canton. They’re
all still here. They’re grizzled old men, some of them, but they carry a lot of the
art. Reach out to all these people [and] tell them how much you like them, how
much you approve of them, how much Mississippi cares for them…Bring this great
Renewed and revitalized.1198

Having recently set foot back inside the Queen City for the first time since his father passed
away in 1948, Lomax saw the festival as a chance for Greenville to highlight the musical
traditions of African Americans and celebrate “its best and purest form.”1199 His sister, Bess
Lomax Hawes, also had similar concerns—in line with Handy—about a “strange situation”

1199 Ibid.
among “young people from a traditional background,” who often complained, “I don't want to learn this old stuff. I'm going to go off to the big city and learn to be a rock singer.” The popular rock musician, in contrast, often dedicated himself to the preservation of the older musical traditions—of mountain music, blues, other ethnic traditions and folk art. “The authentic is still endangered,” she argued, and she thought the preservation of existing “musical systems,” keeping them “alive and functioning…and growing…and changing,” was very important. Unabashedly “very activist in temperament,” she endeavored to keep the music alive as opposed to “teaching it as though it were gone.” Hawes would come to see the elements that made up the Delta Arts Project as a powerful force for the preservation of black folk traditions in the Delta.¹²⁰⁰

Bess Lomax Hawes was indeed a large factor in the development of early blues tourism in Mississippi through her role in the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), which had experienced dramatic changes in the late-1970s. A policy shift in the NEA happened to coincide with the cultural education initiatives of MACE. A renewal of interest in folk culture across the nation, coupled with a serious increase in grant applications for folk projects, encouraged the NEA to increase its budget for folk arts almost fifty percent to accommodate all the worthy applicants. Though musician and folklorist Alan Jabbour, who deserved most of the credit for his lobbying efforts as the director of folk projects, took his leave from the Endowment in late 1976, the NEA’s support for folk projects was not scaled back. Rather, it increased for the next several years due to the addition of Hawes, then a passionate musician and professor of anthropology and folklore at California State University-Northridge, who had helped organize

the Bicentennial Folk Festival for the Smithsonian. The sister of ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax, was appointed the new director of folk projects at the NEA in January 1977, which coincided with the presidential inauguration of a southern peanut farmer named Jimmy Carter.

Building off the success of the Smithsonian’s Folklife Festival and the Library of Congress’ Folklife Center, Hawes launched an impressive campaign to expand the NEA’s folk arts program, which had heretofore been relegated to “uncoordinated, minor-status projects within several other programs.” By criticizing the insufficient nature of the existing policy and calling for full staffing, funding, and support for a full-fledged folk program, she persuaded the Endowment to appoint her the director of a newly-established, separate Folk Arts Program in early 1978. The NEA consolidated the program’s substantial initial budget of over $1.5 million, but Hawes managed to increase that amount to $2.4 million dollars in 1979 and 1980. Focused on festivals, films, and fiddlers, the majority of the program’s budget supported visual documentation projects and music and dance exhibitions, while apprenticeship programs with recognized folk musicians received the minimal amount of support. Hawes emphasized the sustenance of the folk arts “community” as opposed to individual artists; simply put, she wanted to preserve the most cherished art forms of the nation’s diverse cultural and ethnic communities and make “sure that traditions could be passed down to the next generation.”

Adhering to a semi-strict policy of providing one-time grants to local arts groups and offering the technical guidance of professional consultants, the Folk Arts Program seeded a host of folk projects that

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1203 Binkiewicz, Federalizing the Muse, 213-214.
community organizations, such as MACE, eventually developed into self-sustaining, even profitable annual events, such the Delta Blues Festival.

By the end of the 1970s, the Endowment had embraced a pluralist cultural vision and awarded grants to artistic communities representing a more diverse social landscape in America. The success of the folk arts program, which awarded fewer repeat grants than all other NEA programs, demonstrated the substantial impact of arts programs on the local level. Hawes also attracted the attention and support of Congressional representatives, many of whom appreciated the program’s mission to sustain the more traditional folk arts of their respective regions. Much like his predecessor, President Carter was a staunch supporter of the Endowment’s program movement towards inclusiveness, including its renewed emphasis on traditional arts, supporting women and minority artists, and providing better state and local access to funding for the arts.

The NEA matured during the decade, realizing a more expansive vision of art representative of all Americans.1204

Indeed, the maturation of the NEA showed in its vehement and multi-year support of not only the Delta Blues Festival but several initiatives focused on blues around the country. In the preceding years, the NEA had only given a total of $4,000 towards any program involving the blues—Tom Mazzolini’s San Francisco Blues Festival.1205 In 1978, however, the NEA doled out almost ninety thousand dollars for blues-related projects. In addition to the $15,000 received by the Delta Blues Festival, the Circuit Playhouse of Memphis received $15,000 for the “presentation of local blues artists” at the Beale Street Music Festival. The San Francisco Arts

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1204 Due to the economic recession, however, each of the presidents took steps towards decreasing financial support for the NEA and scaled back the nation’s cultural policy. While Ford briefly lowered the budget only to raise it soon thereafter, Carter anticipated the conservative rhetoric of the 1980s, rolling back the responsibilities of the federal government.

Commission received $4,000 for the San Francisco Blues Festival. $6,000 went to Sum
Concerts, of Houston, for the second annual Juneteenth Blues Festival.\(^{1206}\) As opposed to its
decreasing support for other festivals, however, the support of the NEA for the DBF increased
over the next three years.

The NEA also served to bring the festival organizers at MACE together with two
Mississippians and students of several tradition bearers who lived all around the state. Born in
1954, Elizabeth Thompson (most folks call her Libby Rae) was the rebellious young daughter of
an affluent dentist in Pascagoula named Perry Augustus Thompson, and her grandfather William
Thompson worked as a physician in Escatawpa, Alabama.\(^{1207}\) In her early life, she never
ventured too far from the Gulf Coast. Pascagoula was a blue-collar town with an oil refinery and
a massive shipyard. “It was kind of transient,” she recalled, “which made it a little different from
the rest of Mississippi.”\(^{1208}\) None of her family members played musical instruments, but she
used to pick around on the piano growing up. She also started to play the guitar in high school.
On occasion her friends from California visited and brought the records of artists such as Bob
Dylan and J.J. Cale. She regularly listened to the Allman Brothers, but it was the music of Leon
Russell which “turned her onto” the blues, specifically a blues guitarist from Gilmer, Texas

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\(^{1206}\) There were also several non-festival recipients; $5,000 to Waveland Software, Inc., of Chicago, for the
production of videotape documenting the music and recollections of Chicago blues pianists; $1,000 to Edward T.
Lewis, of Washington D.C., to study blues guitar and vocal techniques; $1,000 to Robert D. Rusch, of Redwood,
NY, for the fieldwork necessary to collect oral history interviews of jazz and blues artists; $4,000 to Charles Sayles,
of Philadelphia, for a blues program in the prisons of Washington D.C; $15,000 to the Pacifica Foundation in DC for
the broadcast of a concert and lecture series to include jazz, folk, and blues music entitled “City Rhythms for Young
People”; $15,000 to the Detroit Council of the Arts to produce a documentary film—directed by Terry Kelley—
about urban blues music in Detroit.; One blues singer got $6,000 for a one-week residency at the University of
Maryland; see, \textit{1978 Annual Report for the National Endowment for the Arts} (Washington, DC: National Council on
the Arts, 1979), 131.

\(^{1207}\) Born November 30, 1910, Perry Thompson had already received his education and license to practice dentistry
in 1940; 1930 US Census, Citronelle, Mobile, Alabama; Roll: 40; Page: 7A; Enumeration District: 0001;
Image: 252.0; FHL microfilm: 23397751940 US Census; Pascagoula, Jackson, Mississippi; Roll: T627_2032;
Page: 20A; Enumeration District: 30-5.

\(^{1208}\) Libby Rae Watson, interview by T. DeWayne Moore, September 29, 2013, Dublin, Mississippi.
named Freddie King. After she graduated from Pascagoula High School in 1971, she enrolled at the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg, where she listened to a radio station out of McGhee, Mississippi that broadcast live shows on the weekends. She heard Joe Farmer and his family perform live on the radio. “Some of it was really good, some of it was really bad,” she admitted, “but it was all great to listen to,” and it all contributed to the cultural education of the young woman who grew up on the Gulf Coast.\footnote{Libby Rae Watson, interview by T. DeWayne Moore, September 29, 2013, Dublin, Mississippi.}

Hattiesburg was not really her kind of town. After her first year, she returned home to Pascagoula and decided to get into the family business. Not only was her father a dentist, but her older sister Tricia worked as a dental hygienist while her husband, Trent Lott, finished law school at the University of Mississippi.\footnote{A dental hygienist by profession, Tricia Thompson Lott laughed, “I cleaned teeth and got Trent through law school (Ole Miss), but I’ve never worked in Washington”; Maria Watson, “Tricia Lott: Speeches Come Easy When You Believe,” \textit{BDH}, Jan 7, 1973, p.15.} Lott, a Pascagoulan and a Republican, defeated incumbent state senator Ben Stone of Gulfport to win the election for representative of the fifth district in 1972, and Mississippi Republicans posted victories which previously had not been matched since the days of Reconstruction. In 1971, another sister, Diane, also got married to a product of the Ole Miss law school named Richard F. Scruggs, better known as “Dickie,” who later tapped into the “dark side of the force,” made a fortune as a trial lawyer, and saw it all fall away in the wake of his conviction on bribery charges.\footnote{Curtis Wilkie, \textit{The Fall of the House of Zeus: The Rise and Ruin of America’s Most Powerful Trial Lawyer} (New York: Crown, 2010), 16.} Libby Rae was a bit lost in the shadow of her older sisters in the early 1970s. She soon knocked out some prerequisite courses at Mississippi State University, got back on track with a bit of her father’s motivation, and moved to Jackson in the mid-1970s to study for a career as a dental hygienist.\footnote{Libby Rae Watson, interview by T. DeWayne Moore, September 29, 2013, Dublin, Mississippi.}
The decision to move to Jackson changed her life forever. The live music scene in Jackson attracted folks from as far as Memphis to venues such as Poets and Widow Watsons. Singer/songwriter George Allen, as well as a lot of musicians from the Delta, played in Jackson during the late-1970s. One evening, a friend came and picked up twenty-three year-old Libby Rae to go hear some local music, and in the back seat of the car sat a thirty-five year-old transient musician hailing from the rolling hills of northern Mississippi, who had spent the last several years working as a casual for Roadway Express and learning from native musicians in his free time. His name was Bobby Ray Watson, and he had immersed himself in the state’s homegrown scene for the blues since high school. He had been friends with many blues artists such as Babe Stovall and Slim Harpo in New Orleans and Fred McDowell, Joe Calicott, and R.L. Burnside in the north Mississippi hills. He had also been a member of the Memphis Country Blues Society. Elizabeth Thompson was smitten with Watson, and her unique music odyssey, or perhaps rollercoaster, began in earnest that night in early 1977.

It was not long before they started travelling the state and visiting all the elder statesmen of the blues, such as Big Joe Williams, who lived in Crawford, and Jack Owens, of Bentonia. The couple fell in love on the backroads largely due to his untutored approach to field research. Indeed, searching for musicians in Mississippi soon researchers managed to locate some interesting people. “That’s literally how we found some people,” Libby declared, “just going to a town, stopping at a station, [and] asking people, ‘Does anybody around here play became a regular adventure, a most intoxicating and romantic tour of blues legends. By simply driving around to different towns and asking folks if they knew any artists or musicians, the smitten field music?’” The scouting method proved successful on a few occasions, as the couple usually

1213 Ibid.
tracked down some folks, who, even if they did not play anymore, “reminisced about the times they did.” On other occasions, they located “some cool folk artists,” one of whom lived in a small wooden house and produced her artwork using colored pencils. Another interesting individual built mechanical motorized robots that moved around in his front yard.\textsuperscript{1215}

After less than a year of travelling around the state with him, Libby Rae had developed a rapport with the last living member of a legendary musical family, Sam Chatmon, son of fiddler Henderson Chatmon and last of the Mississippi Sheiks, a popular string band that included his brothers Armenter (his brothers called him Bo) and Alonzo (Lonnie) Chatmon as well as Walter Vinson. Sam’s career in the recording industry had come to an end, and he settled down to farming in Hollandale in the mid-1930s, bought a house and a half acre, and only played at local parties until his “re-discovery” in the early 1960s.\textsuperscript{1216} The couple visited him often at his home, and Libby Rae started taking informal lessons from her chosen mentor. Chatmon did not mind her hanging around in the least; indeed, a young female student was very welcome to come learn for the elder practitioner of the blues.

The friendly relationships that Bobby Ray Watson and Elizabeth Thompson had developed with musicians in Mississippi made the duo a valuable asset not only to aspiring musicians but also to promoters. In December 1977, hoping to procure a paid apprenticeship grant to study under Chatmon, the couple travelled to Memphis to attend the quarterly meeting of the Folk Arts Panel of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). The panel of nationally recognized folklorists and community arts leaders met in largely closed sessions, but they also held some open meetings for the public, in which Bess Lomax Hawes, the director of the Folk

\textsuperscript{1215} Libby Rae Watson, interview by T. DeWayne Moore, September 29, 2013, Dublin, Mississippi.
Arts Program, discussed the new guidelines for folk arts projects in radio, film, and videotape. Hawes, however, had no affinity for apprenticeship grants, preferring to fund projects that impacted communities as opposed to individuals.\textsuperscript{1217} Though Libby Rae would never receive a grant-funded apprenticeship with Chatmon, it was not a wasted trip. The couple’s appearance allowed for a fortuitous meeting with Karen Shalong Morgan, the founding director of MACE’s Delta Arts Project. Shalong had come to the panel hoping to make connections with knowledgeable individuals, such as Center for Southern Folklore (CSF) director Bill Ferris and ethnomusicologist David Evans. She recognized how fortuitous it was to meet Watson, however, and she immediately recruited them both to help coordinate the 1978 Delta Blues Festival. In essence, she hired the couple to “round up the musicians, get the contracts signed,” arrange for transportation, and attend to the artists’ needs at the festival.\textsuperscript{1218} One brevity in \textit{Living Blues} magazine notes that folklorists Alan Lomax, Worth Long and Bobby Ray Watson acted as masters of ceremonies.\textsuperscript{1219}

Bess Lomax Hawes had previously read the proposal for the Delta Arts Project and expressed great interest in the cultural program. According to ethnomusicologist and brief MACE consultant David Evans, Shalong “was certainly the one that Bess Hawes had her eye on as somebody to support.” In a position to funnel piles of federal money to favored people and projects, Hawes liked to support folks that she believed were “doing good both in terms of folk music work and “socio-political good.” Framed as an extension of the social, political, and

\textsuperscript{1217} The meeting was located at the Holiday Inn Central at McLean and Union, and it also featured NEA Assistant director of the program was Sally Yerkovich. Panelists included Roger Abrahams, Professor of English and Folklore at the University of Texas at Austin, Henry Glassie, Professor of Folklore at the University of Pennsylvania, Fred Lieberman Professor of Ethnomusicology at the University of Washington at Seattle, Ms. Clydia Nahwooksy, U.S. Department of the Interior, David Nelson, Executive Director of the Montana Arts Council, Barre Toelken, Professor of English at the University of Oregon, and Edward Ives, Professor of English at the University of Maine. “Arts Folk Art Panel,” (Memphis, TN) \textit{Tri-State Defender}, Dec 10, 1977, p.6.
\textsuperscript{1218} Libby Rae Watson, interview by T. DeWayne Moore, September 29, 2013, Dublin, Mississippi.
\textsuperscript{1219} Hans Pehl, “Greenville, Miss,” \textit{Living Blues}, Nov 1978.
economic development efforts of MACE, the Delta Art Project planned to tackle, what Hawes believed was, the “most critical problem” of the Folk Arts program—“preservation of the authentic.”1220 “The authentic is still endangered,” she repeated over the years, at least more so than secondary (or derivative) traditions. Hawes, much like Bannerman, seemed to have an eye for talent, and Shalong definitely projected a competent image of being “on the ball…serious, stable,” a person who you knew “would do a good job,” according to Evans.1221 Hawes was amazed at the revolutionary potential of the Delta Arts Project and more than happy to assign Worth Long the task of helping categorize different elements of the proposal, which required submission to several divisions of the NEA and the NEH, among other federal institutions.

Earlier in October 1977, Charles Bannerman and K. Shalong Morgan travelled to New York to attend a luncheon with Dr. Lydia Bront, the Rockefeller Foundation’s associate director for humanities, who provided “suggestions and comments” on revising the proposal for the Delta Arts Project. Bront expressed a concern for “program conflict” with the Center for Southern Folklore, a foundation supported institution in Memphis founded by Bill Ferris and Judy Peiser in 1972. The meeting, in essence, put the arts project “back on the drawing board.”1222 Though Morgan planned to forward a revised final draft in mid-November, it ended up taking over two months to implement all the changes in the project. Morgan claimed to have “strengthened” the “previously established rapport” with the CSF, and she purported to have even convinced Bill Ferris to serve on the advisory council of the Delta Arts Project. He never actually sat on the board, however, at least not in the 1970s. In one letter to the Ford Foundation, Morgan

1221 David Evans, interview by T. DeWayne Moore, September 22, 2014, in his office at the University of Memphis.
1222 K. Shalong Morgan, letter to Gwendolyn T. Blackstone, Jan 9, 1978; Rockefeller Foundation records, general correspondence, RG 2, 1971-1980; subgroup 1979: General Correspondence; series 02.1979/200: United States; Mississippi Action for Community Education (Delta Arts), 1979; Reel 22.
confirmed that MACE had started working with the NEA. Bess Lomax Hawes, she asserted, “was particularly impressed and has assigned a folklorist to work with us as a consultant.”

Even though Shalong originally requested over $150,000 for the Delta Arts Project, Ford did not fund the hiring of full-time staff for the cultural center and ended up providing $20,000 to help with the festival. While the state of Mississippi provided minimal support for the arts, Morgan managed to secure a small grant from the MS Arts Commission, but it was “contingent” on the “ability to secure major funding from other sources.” Morgan submitted a proposal to the CBS Foundation, which had recently awarded a “sizeable grant” to support a community arts drama series in New York, but they did not fund the grant request. The NEA offered financial support in the sum of $14,990 to MACE “to bring local musicians to the Delta Blues Festival.” The Ford Foundation, in addition to its cash grant, donated four films “having to do with the Delta blues myth” to the cultural center and blues archive of MACE. “It’s been an uphill battle,” Bannerman explained, “We’re not recognized in the mafia of arts so we’ve had to struggle for funds.” MACE invested “quite a bit of money in the project” before the NEA grant came through, but he shrugged it off. “If you believe in something,” he closed, “you take the chance.”

Aware of ongoing discussions to establish a “blues institute” in the region, Shalong did not let the Ford Foundation’s lack of vision impede the larger goal of establishing a cultural center in Greenville. No decision, after all, had been made for the appropriate location for the

1223 Ibid.
institution. Memphis and Oxford were the likely college town candidates, but Shalong believed that “strong community support for the festival would show the scholars that Greenville claims the blues as its heritage, making it a credible location for the museum, library and archives.” She realized that she did not have all the funds she wanted, but she hoped to raise enough to move forward and get it started on collecting and storing materials in the archive. Since she fully expected to hire professional folklorists to interview and conduct field recordings of the blues artists who played the festival, Shalong decided to charge a one-dollar admission fee as well as sell souvenir booklets and concessions “not to make the festival a commercial event—but to keep from losing money” by staging the “major regional blues festival” on October 21.1227

The initial concept was to stage the festival as a fundraiser for the cultural center, but Shalong emphasized to one journalist that the festival was not an unabashed money-making effort any longer. While she certainly hoped it had a positive balance sheet and brought an infusion of cash into the local economy, she had to make up a deficit by renting out booths to vendors. “We still need people to sign up for booths,” Shalong pleaded, explaining that non-profits and arts groups only had to pay twenty-five dollars. Any commercial business or civic group operating a concession stand, however, paid fifty. Sam Moncure, general manager of Fine Vines, signed up concessionaires and provided booth space applications during regular business hours at the blue jeans retail store that MACE opened at 517 Washington Avenue.1228

The festival was only one element in a larger project to establish a “comprehensive Delta arts cultural resource center” in the old Elk’s Lodge building, which possessed unique structural features. MACE originally acquired the building to serve as its headquarters, but the organization

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instead moved its base of operations to the renovated YMCA building on Theobald Street. Addressing two central concerns, Shalong informed, the cultural center would facilitate “the preservation and study of the blues” as well as enable MACE “to take the arts to the disadvantaged and poor people” living in its fourteen county region of influence. Since the blues was “not just a mere art form,” but also “a way of life” for many local people, MACE believed establishing the center and developing cultural education programs were an extension of their mission to improve the quality of life in the black communities of the Delta.

Over the years, however, several individuals obscured this fact and took credit for having come up with the concept for the blues festival. Owens Brooks felt that it stemmed from the Fannie Lou Hamer Festival earlier in the summer, which he organized and included a civil rights education component. Unita Blackwell told historian Robert Korstad that “the blues festival came out of my head and two or three other folks.” National Public Radio disc jockey Scott Barretta conducted some very curious research to reach his conclusion for a marker on the Mississippi Blues Trail, which argues that “the festival…was…the brainchild of members Charles Bannerman and Kay [sic] Morgan.” While each of the individuals mentioned certainly helped shape the event to some degree in its initial years, the most likely candidate for the genesis of the event that grew within MACE was Isaiah Winters, of the Holmes County Union for Progress. According to Emma Cooper Harris, each affiliate of MACE had to come up

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1229 The Elks Lodge, therefore, housed a number of community action initiatives, such as the seasonal farm workers program, Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA), and Youth Community Conservation and Improvement Program (YCCIP).
with an annual plan of action and develop a fundraising calendar. Though the affiliates met at the
head office in Greenville at different times each month to coordinate their efforts, they all
gathered at the home office and presented their plans at the same time once a year. Isaiah
Winters “wrote that blues plan in his fundraising activities,” Harris asserted, and “Bannerman
read everything you gave him.” He admitted on the day of the festival that it had been over
two years in the making. It was after reading through the proposal for a blues festival in Holmes
County that Charles Bannerman felt so inspired to start a public relations campaign and begin
looking at the cultural education possibilities at MACE.

Shalong had invited everyone to the home of Nimrod to announce that MACE received
funding to stage the festival. It was only one element, however, in a larger project to establish a
“comprehensive Delta arts cultural resource center” in the old Elk’s Lodge building, which
possessed unique structural features. MACE originally acquired the building to serve as its
headquarters, but the organization instead moved its base of operations to the renovated YMCA
building on Theobald Street. Addressing two central concerns, Shalong informed, the
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“to take the arts to the disadvantaged and poor people” living in its fourteen county region of
influence. Since the blues was “not just a mere art form,” but also “a way of life” for many local
people, MACE wanted the center to develop programs and help further improve the quality of
life in the black communities of the Delta. On the day of the festival, Bannerman referred to
it as the “Blues Institute and Museum,” but he then thought:

1234 Emma Cooper Harris, interview by T. DeWayne Moore, June 6, 2013, Anguilla, Mississippi.
1235 The Elks Lodge, therefore, housed a number of community action initiatives, such as the seasonal farm workers
program, Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA), and Youth Community Conservation and
Improvement Program (YCCIP).
maybe museum is the wrong word. We don’t want to collect the blues and put it in a bottle. We’re not purists or historians. We plan to set up a place where young musicians can come and study with the older men you’ve been hearing this afternoon. That’s the way the blues have always lived and grown and spread. This is a beginning, the only blues festival sponsored and put on by blacks. But don’t misunderstand me—put on by blacks, but for everybody.\textsuperscript{1237}

One of the central goals of staging the festival and establishing the cultural center was to facilitate the education of local people and perpetuate African American cultural traditions. “Even though Mississippi is considered the home of the blues,” Shalong explained, “it is celebrated more in other parts of the world than it is here at home. Blues are bigger in England than in American because America hasn’t claimed the blues as part of its musical heritage. We hope to preserve the blues and promote an understanding of it.” That was the “most important thing,” folklorist Worth Long declared, “is that we’re bringing the blues back home. Not only that, but also a community development organization that has permanence here has organized it so bluesmen can be heard and appreciated in their own locale.” Some of the performers, such as Furry Lewis and Sam Chatmon, had been acknowledged around the world as “master musicians,” and in Long’s opinion, the DBF at long last “legitimized these men in their own communities.”\textsuperscript{1238} “In the past two years,” as Shalong put it in September 1978, MACE became “more and more concerned with helping to serve their cultural needs as well. The Delta blues is not just a mere art form. It stems from a way of life. Hopefully, the center could also help with programs to improve the quality of life.”\textsuperscript{1239} She also felt that by promoting the blues, MACE can also “generate an understanding between people.”\textsuperscript{1240}

Shalong did not have an excessive amount of pre-festival promotions, but she felt that the festival deserved more “state-wide attention.” At a press conference on October 17, Governor Cliff Finch issued a proclamation, which “took all of two minutes to sign,” that declared the week before the festival as “Delta Blues Festival” week in honor of the MACE event.1241 WBAD, the formerly owned radio station out of Leland, planned to provide a live broadcast of the festival, which, according to Shalong, was being advertised as far away as Chicago, Atlanta, New Orleans, St. Louis, and Little Rock.1242 “That’s nice,” she added, “but what’s important to me is that all the people, young and old, Black and white, will come out together to enjoy and support our own common Mississippi music.”1243 Morgan did not expect the festival to receive as much media attention as it did. “We didn’t plan it as being a big media event,” she revealed after the festival, “In fact, I didn’t put that much work into the media aspect. But as people got wind of it, the whole concept got larger from the small, community festival we had originally envisioned.”1244

MACE decided to stage the 1978 Delta Blues Festival—similar to civil rights meetings in the 1960s, other promotional events of MACE, and countercultural events featuring rock music in the early 1970s—on black-owned land in the middle of nowhere. The small community known as Freedom Village was a failed experiment in establishing a self-sustaining agricultural and industrial cooperative for displaced black farmers as an alternative to outward migration.1245 It certainly was not the first venue examined by consultants from the NEA. Indeed, the location of the festival remained up in the air as late as the beginning of September. According to

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Shalong, the NEA had seriously considered staging the festival in Yazoo City, but MACE headquarters was in Washington County, a larger, more centrally-located county that had a better history of race relations than other Delta counties. “We won over Yazoo City,” she declared, “but we’ve got to keep it. If it doesn’t go well this year, they might have it next year and the years after.” While the article does not mention any specific reasons for considering Yazoo City as the site of a MACE event, Lydia Bront had warned Bannerman and MACE about potential conflicts with the Center for Southern Folklore (CSF). With the support of locals Martha Williams, JoAnne Prichard, Jim Weems, and David Carpenter, CSF director Bill Ferris had announced plans earlier in January to hold a “delta blues festival” in Yazoo City. One article in the Yazoo Herald claimed it would be “one of the first to be held in the Delta.”

Even though Shalong had spoken with Ferris and received his support, he did not work with MACE for many years and instead devoted his academic reputation to legitimizing the Delta Blues Museum in Clarksdale and the Center for the Study of Southern Culture in Oxford.

Ferris had also signed on to organize the second weekend of entertainment at the 15th annual Mississippi Arts Festival, which featured local songbird Dorothy Moore. The focus of the entire second weekend was the folk arts, featuring lectures, films, performances and demonstrations on folk crafts, the blues, folk tales, and sacred music. The Center for Southern Folklore in Memphis received sponsorship from the Mississippi Museum of Art, which held its grand opening during the festival. “Critics noticed not only the superior quality of the festival’s presentations,” argued Westley F. Busbee Jr., a longtime historical consultant for the

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1247 The 15th annual Mississippi Arts Festival departed from past tradition, featuring three weekends of special events, such as a symphony, ballet, opera, art exhibits, street festival activities and concerts by pianist Van Cliburn, entertainer Dorothy Moore and actor James Whitmore in the vicinity of the Arts Center Planetarium-Municipal Auditorium Complex; see, “Mississippi Arts Festival Sets Two Full Weeks of Entertainment,” LLC, Apr 11, 1978, p.5.
state attorney general’s office, “but also the occasional inclusion of racially integrated audiences—this during the years of the state’s strongest resistance to civil rights for blacks.”

Due to mounting expenses and a lack of volunteers, Busbee Jr. purports, the MAF had no choice but to shut down after 1978. It’s more likely, however, that the racially integrated crowd noted by the “critics” was deeply disturbing to many white Mississippians, and the MAF did not return in 1979 for the same reasons as the Mainstream Festival after 1980. The cancellation of festivals meant to encourage fellowship and understanding not only occurred alongside the rise of blues festivals in Mississippi, but the cancellations also revealed the limits of music festivals as a vehicle for social change. If too effective, the powers that be would shut the festivals down. In part due to the increasingly integrated festival crowds, Ferris had to temporarily relinquish control over much of what was going on in the state in terms of the blues.

It was perhaps due to fear of integrated audiences that Ferris lost out on the opportunity to organize a state-sponsored blues festival the following year in Jackson. A fear of racially integrated crowds at local events, however, was not the issue that kept Ferris from staging a Delta blues festival in Yazoo City—nor, for that matter, was the blues festival already being organized in the nearby town of Bentonia by Jackson State College alumnus Jimmy Holmes. Not receiving any coverage in the local newspapers, it originated around this time as a black alternative to Yazoo City’s Old Fashioned 4th of July Celebration—an event and a holiday which African Americans had traditionally held in low regard. Holmes decided to return home instead.

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1249 From 1964 to 1978, the NEA, the MAC, local businesses and individuals funded the Mississippi Arts Festival, an annual exposition that contributed to the cultural and social well-being of the state. By organizing programs including popular actors, musicians, dancers, and exhibits of prestigious works of art, the MAF attracted some national media attention; see, Westley F. Busbee Jr., *Mississippi: A History* (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 262.
of engage in a teaching career after college, and he operated the Blues Front Café while setting his mind on helping local people realize their potential in the post-civil rights era.

Two consultants from the NEA instead surveyed all the available venues in the Queen City. The uninviting construction site (described in more detail at the end of the chapter on Sarah Johnson) at the fairgrounds dissuaded them from using the Washington County Exposition Center, and the potential backlash from evangelical conservatives, who had recently protested against the sale of alcohol at the Mainstream Festival, certainly made the downtown levee unattractive. The consultants, moreover, hoped to eschew the “commercial atmosphere” at festivals in Memphis and New Orleans.\(^{1250}\) “Holding events at such sites as the levee or the Expo Center,” they argued, “would promote something a little more commercial than” desired.\(^{1251}\) After all, Worth Long had insisted the festival invoke the spirit of grassroots democracy and the memory of the late Fannie Lou Hamer. Indeed, he told Bannerman it had to have “the struggle in it.” He wanted to produce a festival that was “all controlled, all owned, by the community,” which ensured that African Americans shaped the political meanings and presented the cultural traditions of local people in such a way that it inspired pride.\(^{1252}\)

Stephen A. King, in his book *I’m Feeling the Blues Right Now*, makes a wildly errant claim about the DBF simply to offer further evidence for his argument. He examines contemporary promotional materials for blues tourism and posits that due to the myth of the blues being born in the fields of the Mississippi Delta, festival organizers made decisions to stage blues concerts primarily at outdoor venues, in parks and open fields. Due to a serious dearth of

research, he uses the 1978 DBF at Freedom Village as his prime example. “Since the inception of the festival in 1978,” King asserts, “the organizers have believed that the cotton field is an appropriate location for a blues festival.” He bases his assertion on a couple of brief statements to newspapers, one from a random person volunteering at the festival in 1979 and the other in 1978 from MACE executive director Charles Bannerman. The statement of Bannerman reflects more his clever ability to come up with an explanation on the fly. His comment really had little to nothing to do with the decision to stage the festival at Freedom Village.

Bess Lomax Hawes, in her capacity as director of folk life projects at the NEA, had sent folklorist Worth Long to consult on all matters relating to production. Though he looked at the Washington County Expo Building, the concrete wharf in downtown Greenville, and almost held the festival in Yazoo City, Long may have been the individual who eventually decided that Freedom Village was the most appropriate location due to its linkage to the black freedom struggle. The festival site, moreover, was not held in a cotton field. While the entirety of Freedom Village may have been surrounded by agricultural land, the festival took place in the large sports and recreation field sitting in the center of the village, in between its two rows of houses.

If Charles Bannerman had anything to do with the decision to stage the event at Freedom Village, however, it was most likely due to his recent opening of an eight-washer laundromat in the village. It was the rural town’s second profit-seeking operation after its recreational and

1254 Bannerman’s comments most likely reflect his savvy ability to justify the sparse amount of sound equipment and other problems associated with this freshman effort. In the article by Greg Bangs, Bannerman explains, “We wanted to have it in the country to typify the blues. Country people won't come to fancy places. Blues isn't meant for the cocktail circuit. We wanted all types, black and white, to come”; see, Greg B. Bangs, “Blues Festival Celebrates Dying Art,” (Jackson, MS) *Clarion-Ledger Daily News*, Oct 22, 1978, p.3A, 6A.
1255 King, *I’m Feeling the Blues Right Now*, 111.
The Delta Foundation provided funding for the business with a fifteen-thousand-dollar loan. “The laundry represents a break from the past,” Bannerman declared, and “people are not giving as much as they used to give…You’ve got to wake up and get out there and get it yourselves.” The investment in the laundromat was intended to inspire the completion of housing goals and the expansion of job opportunities. Freedom Village, he pointed out, boasted a sewer system capable of handling the services of one hundred homes, but only twenty homes stood in the area. Unable to receive housing loans due to a floodplain ruling—not to mention periodic floods that inundated the entire village—residents had been trying to get loans for improvements to existing homes as well as mortgage money to build additional homes for several years.

Bannerman and MACE stepped in at Freedom Village at the behest of Glen Allen native Jake Ayers, who had watched the community struggle under the leadership of the Delta Ministry since its inception in 1966. In Divine Agitators, Mark Newman demonstrates how the Delta Ministry fought hard for the rights of poverty-stricken and displaced African Americans, and he pays particular attention to the agricultural and industrial collective at Freedom Village. Since the DM encouraged a sharecropper’s strike, which failed miserably, it saddled itself with the responsibility of housing the displaced workers. Freedom Village, Newman argues, had all but failed earlier in the 1970s due to a lack of realistic planning and pragmatic management on the part of the Delta Ministry. Charles Bannerman, however, was more optimistic than ever in 1978.

Inspired by the success of the Delta Foundation and the new cultural initiatives of MACE, Bannerman hoped to inspire a fresh start with the help of its hardworking general

manager, Jake Ayers, who admitted that the project had remained in debt because the people thought it was a free place to live off the federal government. “No one wanted to pay taxes, house notes, rent, light bills or anything,” he exclaimed in a speech in early September 1978.\textsuperscript{1259} Delta Ministry director Owen Brooks “was very happy to see [the festival] located at the village,” and he “was very happy to see it gain a modicum of success” over the years.\textsuperscript{1260} The “movement city” on Wilmot Road, as Worth Long described it, in any case, did not become the site of the festival.\textsuperscript{1261}

Many problems arise when scholars try to make the evidence fit their premature conclusions. Some of the more serious problems with King’s failure to seriously examine MACE and the Delta Blues Festival were his conflation of several different early festivals and selective use of evidence, the last of which reveals itself, on occasion, through the misappropriation of facts. In his most recent essay, for example, King manipulates the facts of a newspaper article to offer an errant depiction of the 1978 Delta Blues Festival. Drawing from the Gregg Bangs’ October 22, 1978 article in the \textit{Jackson Daily News}, he writes that the crowd consisted of about “two thousand blues enthusiasts and curiosity seekers,” who hoped “to partake of local, regional, and national talent (e.g., Eugene Powell, James “Son” Thomas, John Lee Hooker) playing mostly acoustic blues in a field.”\textsuperscript{1262}

First of all, John Lee Hooker never made it. Shalong told the local newspaper that the appearance of John Lee Hooker “fell through at the last minute.”\textsuperscript{1263} Second, the expectations of both musicians and attendees were hardly monolithic at the haphazardly-organized, inaugural

\begin{footnotes}
\item[\textsuperscript{1259}]“FV Business Doubles,” \textit{DDT}, Sep 3, 1978, p.3.
\item[\textsuperscript{1260}]Owen Brooks and Lucina Brooks, interview by T. DeWayne Moore, May 23, 2013, Jackson, Mississippi.
\end{footnotes}
event. As people arrived at Freedom Village, Eugene Powell greeted them with his Gibson guitar. He played “complex melodies” called his “stuff,” and he attracted a crowd of people, a few of whom passed a bottle wrapped in a paper bag.\textsuperscript{1264} James “Son” Thomas was the opening act of the festival and Eugene Powell, following in prime form, “impressed the crowd with his picking.”\textsuperscript{1265} King is somewhat correct in noting the musical focus on African American guitarists who specialize in country blues, but nineteen other musicians performed after Powell in 1978, including 15 year-old “Little” Marcellus Richmond on electric guitar, white guitarist “Papa” Don McMinn and his three-piece band from Memphis, and Joe Willie Wilkins and his six-piece band. Folklorists Alan Lomax and Worth Long also introduced several of the musicians who had recently participated in the recording of a documentary, \textit{The Land Where the Blues Began}. Most of the artists were men over 50, but MACE had planned to have a couple of women and white artists.\textsuperscript{1266}

Having recently performed at a “combination blues night and political rally” in support of Charles Evers’ senatorial bid at the Mixon-Garrett VFW Post in Greenville, B.B. King was unable to perform at the event himself. He had also scheduled a three-week tour of western Europe.\textsuperscript{1267} King had agreed to serve on the special advisory panel to the festival, and he arranged for Shalong to negotiate with touring blues artists, such as Muddy Waters, Little Milton, Bobby Bland, and O.V. Wright. On Saturday October 7, Shalong went to Memphis in hopes of adding some more popular artists to the already-massive lineup of blues artists.

\textsuperscript{1265} Greg B. Bangs, “Blues Festival Celebrates Dying Art,” (Jackson, MS) \textit{Clarion-Ledger}, Oct 22, 1978, p.3A, 6A.
\textsuperscript{1266} Carol Taff, “They’ll Be Singing the Blues in the Delta Saturday,” \textit{JCL}, Oct 20, 1978, p.1C.
Shalong was “still working” on booking Big Joe Williams and Roosevelt Sykes after the first week in October.\footnote{33 On Blues Festival List,” \textit{DDT}, Oct 8, 1978, p.1}

Even though the additional bookings raised the number of performing artists to thirty-five, she still wanted to book Bobby Bland and Muddy Waters. On the day before the festival, Shalong finally admitted that they would not appear at the inaugural event due to scheduling conflicts. She confirmed the addition of two “noted blues guitarists,” John Lee Hooker and Albert King, but it required the addition of an “after-the-concert” show at the Elks Serene Lodge on East Alexander Street to cover the costs. “Since we wouldn’t otherwise have the money to secure these big name artists,” Morgan informed, “the Elks have donated the use of their lodge” as a contribution towards the “eventual establishment” of the blues institute in Greenville. From 9 p.m. to 1 a.m., the Oliver Davis Band, of Chicago, and Albert King, along with other festival musicians, performed for five dollars a head.\footnote{David Saltz, “Hooker, Albert King to Play,” \textit{DDT}, Oct 15, 1978, p.1; David Saltz, “Blues Artists to Perform Saturday,” \textit{DDT}, Oct 20, 1978, p.14.}

King’s description of the crowd at the 1978 DBF is wholly inaccurate. Far from consisting of “two thousand blues enthusiasts and curiosity seekers,” the crowd at the 1978 Delta Blues Festival was made up of over five thousand people, by almost all accounts, eighty percent of which were African Americans from surrounding Delta counties.\footnote{Former MFDP leader in Washington County L. C Dorsey and novelist Ellen Douglas both estimated the crowd size at around five thousand people; see, Ellen Douglas, “Mississippi Delta Beat: It’s ‘Lived and Grown and Spread,’” \textit{The Washington Post}, Oct 23, 1978, B3; L.C. Dorsey, “The Blues Is Every Where,” \textit{Jackson Advocate}, Oct 26-Nov 1, 1978, p.16A.} Gregg Bangs clearly reports that Bannerman and Shalong expected a crowd of about two thousand, but they had exceeded that mark by four o’clock as cars continued to pull in.\footnote{Greg B. Bangs, “Blues Festival Celebrates Dying Art,” (Jackson, MS) \textit{Clarion-Ledger Daily News}, Oct 22, 1978, p.3A, 6A.} MACE offered free transportation from ten sites around Greenville to Freedom Village as well as a door-to-door
pickup service for elderly and handicapped people. MACE-affiliated organizations also
mobilized to transport folks from Sharkey, Issaquena, Tallahatchie, Holmes, Panola, Humphreys,
Quitman, Madison, Leflore, and Washington counties. Surely some curiosity seekers came to
see the blues masters play “mostly acoustic blues in a field,” as King asserts, but the
overwhelming majority of people in attendance were African Americans, all of whom either
associated themselves with an affiliate of MACE, caught rides to the festival intent on
socializing, or came out to show their support for the progressive social, economic, and political
prospects of African Americans in the Delta. Each of the county affiliates setup makeshift
booths and sold various items. Emma Cooper Harris and the Sharkey-Issaquena County
Improvement Association, for example, setup a booth on top of her 1968 Chevrolet. Since the
organization operated a youth record shop in the corner of a Rolling Fork laundromat, they sold
records, incense, snacks, and sodas.

On location for the Washington Post, local novelist Ellen Douglas (pen name for
Josephine Ayres Haxton) reported the crowd was very diverse, with “earnest academic types,
garden club ladies, and old-line civil rights activists sitting side-by-side in the grass.” Former
Washington County Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) leader L. C. Dorsey,
however, noticed that “the soul-folk had come…to the Delta flatlands, to the cottonfields,
mosquitos, dirt and the hot sun…to welcome…home [the] kings and one queen” of the blues.
She estimated the crowd was perhaps ten percent white. An estimated five hundred whites,
nevertheless, came out to Freedom Village and witnessed a historic event. In the opinion of DDT

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1273 Emma Cooper Harris, interview by T. DeWayne Moore, June 6, 2013, Anguilla, Mississippi.
1978, B3
editor Hodding Carter III, no other event in the region’s history had “ever made so many black folks and white folks so happy.”

In *Jackson Magazine*, Elliot Broderick described the crowd as a “decidedly diverse mixture of humanity,” but as high as seventy percent black. He expected to see mostly young, middle-class whites, considering the “segment’s discovery of the blues in the past ten years,” but the age span and socioeconomic status of both whites and blacks was broad—“literally people from all stations in life had come to this gathering. That, in itself, was remarkable.” He also noticed “the almost tangible mood of harmony that prevailed among festival goers.” Invoking the spirit of altruistic “brotherhood week,” Broderick reported the crowd was “just a bunch of folks—different folks—getting’ together to dig the blues.”

By having the artists perform “on the back of rusty flatbed trailer truck,” King purports, MACE intended to complement the festival’s focus on “down-home blues.” The stage was not imbued with any sort of symbolism, however, and people in rural areas often used flat-bed trailers as a stage. African American landowner, farmer and member of the Sharkey/Issaquena County Improvement Association (S-ICIA) King T. Evans graciously pulled his flat-bed out to Freedom Village in support of MACE. Evans, in fact, used to drive blues recording artist Bo Carter (Armenter Chatmon) of the musical Chatmon family, to the doctor regularly. His decision to pull the flatbed to Freedom Village probably had little to do with constructing authenticity and more to do with necessity. It was common at political rallies, festivals, and other celebrations in the Delta for speakers and entertainers to stand on top of a flat-bed trailer to address the

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1275 “We’ve Got the Blues,” editorial, *DDT*, Oct 22, 1978, p.4
1278 Emma Cooper Harris, interview by T. DeWayne Moore, June 6, 2013, Anguilla, Mississippi.
audience. In the 1960s, the performances of the Extension Gospel Quartet at the annual “Negro Field Day” held at the Experiment Station in nearby Stoneville became a “field day tradition,” which included a flatbed truck stage positioned under the shade trees. At its second annual rice and field day festival, MACE used a “long wide flatbed truck upon which various, diverse musical presentations were performed.” The Parchman Farm Prison Band performed on top of a flatbed trailer at the Rosedale Bicentennial in 1976. The young rock fans of Greenville, moreover, used a flatbed trailer for their stage at the 1970 Delta Rock Festival. Considering that MACE only used a flatbed trailer in 1978 and built a wooden stage each of the following years, they seemed less concerned with a “down home blues” image than professional staging. If anything, the stage worked against King’s “down home blues” image in 1979, according to Mike Leach, who described it as “a huge make-shift contraption of light fixtures, wires, mikes, amplifiers and other pieces of electronic equipment, all of which gave it the appearance of a huge unseemly object typically seen in sci-fi movies.”

Not a cloud was in the blue Delta sky in 1978, the beanfields had turned brown, and the early crowd had blankets and air mattresses spread out on the hastily cut, rough pastureland. In fact, it never rained on the festival for as long as MACE held it on the wide open, dusty field between the houses of Freedom Village—the first nine years. It was hot outside still in late October. The only shade available was under one of four funeral tents on loan from a local funeral home, and people who arrived in sweaters ended up pulling them off. All sorts of folks came in a steady stream of cars. In Ford pickups and beat-up Chevrolet’s and Cadillac’s,

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festivalgoers weaved their way through the narrow country roads, littered with freshly-picked cotton that never made it to the loading trailers. Few if any of the spectators, who had travelled from as far away as New York or Denver, seemed put out when they learned that the two biggest acts, Albert King and John Lee Hooker, would not perform at the festival. Hooker’s appearance, of course, fell through at the last minute, and King played the later fundraising concert.1284

Bannerman and Shalong predicted that a couple thousand might show up, but the number of attendees had exceeded that mark around four o’clock. With a line of cars rumbling to pull in the parking area, Shalong explained, “people in the Delta work late on Saturdays so they’re going to get here late.”1285 Many of the native blues artists who developed relationships with Bobby Ray Watson, Libby Thompson, and Worth Long made up their way into the lineup in 1978. Watson brought R.L. Burnside, Big Joe Williams, and Stonewall Mays; Thompson had created a bond with Sam Chatmon, and Worth Long arranged for appearances of many of the musicians who appear in the documentary film *The Land Where the Blues Began*. Though the focus was on older black male artists, MACE included a couple of female blues artists as well as white musicians.1286

One journalist noted that the first part of the program was dedicated to “traditional blues,” because the emcees tried “to give the history of how blues evolved in this country.”1287 It did not come off as evolution, however, but more like sporadic phenomenon on the stage.

1286 “All of the performers are not old, but most are over 50,” K. Shalong Morgan admitted, “They’re not all men—two are women. And they’re not all black—about ten are white. But they all have one thing in common—the blues.”
1287 The lineup for the festival in order of appearance was James "Son" Thomas; Eugene Powell, Sam Chatmon, Big Joe Williams; Walter Brown and Joe Savage; George Fuller (white) from Jackson; Houston Stackhouse; Lizzie Butler; Stonewall Mays; Furry Lewis; Rural L. Burnside; Othar Turner; Napoleon Strickland; “Little” Marcellus Richmond; Jack Owens and Bud Spires; Piano Red; Don McMinn with a three-piece band from Memphis; Joe Willie Wilkins with a six-piece band; Van Hunt and Mose Vinson.
Sometimes to the “utter confusion of the crowd,” Lomax delivered lectures and presented demonstrations, which he intended to show the historical development of the blues. In his initial address to the audience, he declared, “We’re looking for a bit of Africa in Mississippi.” When he introduced Son Thomas, he stated, “Come on, Son, play with both hands like an African.” Thomas wore a leisure suit and sat with his legs crossed, holding his electric guitar in his lap and grinning from beneath the “brim of his rakishly cocked hat.” One of Lomax’s demonstrations featured Walter Brown and Joe Savage, and it showed how blues patterns developed from men chopping wood. According to L.C. Dorsey, the two men contributed “slave songs” and “work songs” as they hewed away at an ancient log.

Early on during the festival, the emcees called out the honor roll of the Delta blues—Robert Johnson, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Son House, Howlin’ Wolf, and Bessie Smith. Charles Bannerman also invited to the stage the black mayors of half a dozen towns in the Delta, where he introduced them to the audience. “Majestic, tall, and dark-skinned,” noted Ellen Douglas, Unita Blackwell spoke for the group of mayors and told the crowd: “You people are on sacred grounds.”

As Eugene Powell climbed up onto the stage, Lomax insisted, “This man should be in Mississippi schools teaching the blues.” Bannerman agreed and spoke about it while Powell finished setting up. “Right now,” he argued, “blues is a dying art form. We would like to see it taught in the schools. But if we can’t get the schools to do it, we [MACE] will.”

After the director of MACE aroused the crowd, Eugene Powell “impressed the crowd with his picking.” Big Joe Williams also delivered a “rousing, crowd-inspiring performance”

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1288 Patrick Peterson, “Delta Blues Festival Returns Musicians to Center Stage,” JDN, Oct 27, 1978, p.6E.
from the “flatbed trailer truck that served as a stage.” Underneath a tent donated by a local funeral home, Williams jammed with guitarists and harmonica players, delighting a multitude of photographers. Sam Chatmon “enlivened the crowd with his raucous, sometimes raunchy, hilarious lyrics.” George Fuller, of Jackson, yodeled his Jimmy Rodgers-style “white blues,” according to DDT staff writer David Saltz. Bobby Ray Watson brought his friend Rural L. Burnside, of Greenleaf, and he offered up some “rousing guitar playing and vocals.” “Behind the scenes,” Shalong later admitted, “nobody was quite sure who was going to play when,” but the confusion went unnoticed out front. Stonewall Mayes, of Coldwater, did not seem to mind much. While waiting to take the stage, he admitted, “I’m just having a fine time listening.”

“Little” Marcellus Richmond was from the hill country around Byhalia and Olive Branch, and he learned how to play guitar by listening to old 78 rpm records. Having come up around Nesbit, Bobby Ray Watson eventually heard about the young guitarist, went out and found him, and signed him up to perform at the 1978 DBF. “He was the new blood, showing that it’s young people too,” Libby Rae recalled, “because one of the issues was trying to find” black youths who performed more traditional forms of blues. “They weren’t interested in that old music,” she declared, “So, to find someone like Little Marcellus, it was great.” The press was noticeably silent about the much-anticipated debut of “Little” Marcellus, however, and he joined Othar Turner and Napoleon Strickland as the only performers not described in any accounts of the event.

1294 Libby Rae Watson, interview by T. DeWayne Moore, September 29, 2013, Dublin, Mississippi.
The ad-hoc interplay of Lomax with the artists continued with a Bentonia duo from the documentary. “Where do the blues come from?” Lomax queried in his introduction of guitarist Jack Owens and harmonica player Bud Spires. The folklorist declared that the duo “polished their songs year after year like a jeweler polishes a diamond.” Lomax also decided that before Owens and Spires performed that he wanted to talk about the legacy of racial segregation in Yazoo County. “In the part of the country they’re from,” Lomax explained,

“If a black man stopped at a red light he was liable to get a ticket because that was the light the white folks were supposed to stop at. That’s where the blues come from sometimes. If a black man was riding a white mule and came to a crossroads where a white man was sitting, the black man’d have to say, ‘Get up, Mr. Mule.’ If you wanted a can of Prince Albert tobacco, you’d have to ask for Mr. Prince Albert.”

Jack Owens agreed and said, “That’s right. You’d have to ask for Mr. Prince Albert because a white man’s picture was on the can. That’s where the blues come from sometime.”

Memphis Piano Red had been discovered in the late ’60s during blues revival. Otherwise known as John Williams, he brought his relaxed barrelhouse piano blues to the festival from the Memphis Blues Caravan. Papa Don McMinn, also known as “The Boogeyman,” was one of the two white blues singers who made it onstage, and he brought his three-piece Rum Boogie Band with him from their regular haunt, the Rum Boogie Café on Beale Street. Joe Willie Wilkins and his big six-piece band got to play a short set as the sun cooled and sank into the evening.

According to Jackson Advocate correspondent L.C. Dorsey, the crowd “thanked God (or their special deity) that they were part of this day, of this experience, that they were part of the black concept called the blues,” the last example of which Memphis songstress Van Hunt and pianist

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Mose Vinson released into the night, bringing an end, according to J. Eliot Broderick, to the embodiment of “total harmony with the spirit and simplicity of the country blues.”

Lots of folks who attended the festival headed over to the “after-the-concert” show at Elks Serene Lodge. All of the proceeds went towards the “eventual establishment” of the blues institute in Greenville. The Oliver Davis Band came down from Chicago and hit the stage around ten o’clock, and Albert King followed up to close the initial day of the first annual Delta Blues Festival. Other artists, such as Frank Frost, Sam Myers, and Willie Nix, of Leland, as well as Detroit Jr., who brought a band from Chicago, informed Living Blues magazine of their attendance, but none of them got a chance to perform for the crowd. The inability of some bands to get some stage time caused some to tension to linger after the festival.

Another point of contention arose out of the conflict over fair compensation for the performing artists. In the original proposal, the festival served as the primary fundraising vehicle for the cultural institute in Greenville, and Shalong had some difficulty explaining this concept to almost everyone. “It’s been very difficult to sell them on the idea that it’s a non-profit benefit,” she commented, “because they’ve been used by exploitive promotors so many times. Still we’re trying.”

According to Elizabeth Thompson, MACE expected her to get all the artists, even the more established among them, to sign contracts for fifty dollars. “They gave us these contracts and they wanted us to pay these guys fifty bucks,” she explained, which did not include money for transportation or hotels.”

There was no shade on the flat-bed trailer and no consideration of the needs of the older artists, she complained, “and some of these guys [we]re

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1300 Libby Rae Watson, interview by T. DeWayne Moore, September 29, 2013, Dublin, Mississippi.
eighty-five years-old.” The lack of preparation to accommodate older artists and the expectation that musicians from Mississippi could in no way want more than fifty dollars demonstrated the thrown-together nature of the event, which had been initially put forward as a fundraiser.

Bobby Ray Watson and Elizabeth Thompson were less than pleased about being put in such a situation, and they also felt such a meager amount of compensation was an insult to some of the artists. Other artists, however, were quite content to play a short set for a small fee. Bentonia-native Jack Owens, for example, had performed at summer festivals and made some field recordings, all without having to venture far from his hometown of Bentonia. After performing at the 1978 Delta Blues Festival, Owens told the Capital Reporter that he had never before seen so many people in one place. “They treated me good too,” he declared, “There was a lot of food and a lot to drink [and] I got eight or ten or twenty dollars.”

James “Son” Thomas had performed at several colleges—Tougaloo, Millsaps, Jackson State, Delta State, Ole Miss, and the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee. He had played for large crowds at the Festival of American Folklife and the State Capitol Museum in Jackson, but he continued to work at Hewitt’s Furniture Center in Leland. Thomas got paid seventy-five dollars for performing at a festival in Memphis. “That was my first big money,” he explained in one 1977 interview, “Then my next trip was to [the University of] Maine, and that’s where I made the $250.” Owens and Thomas were always willing to perform for smaller fees in Bentonia. Jimmy Holmes had organized summer festivals in his hometown since the mid-1970s. He never had too much money to throw around for the artists, but they never complained

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to him about it. Holmes and local musicians cared about the fellowship involved in a celebration within the black community.

Sam Chatmon was one of the most-experienced and well-travelled of all the blues musicians from the Delta, but he also played extensively in the local community. Ever since his tour of West Coast coffee houses in 1961, Chatmon played at all sorts of colleges and folk festivals, including the Festival of American Folklife and the San Diego Folk Festival.\textsuperscript{1303} In one 1977 interview, he admitted to receiving over five hundred dollars for playing only a thirty minute set at long-distance gigs. Chatmon received a big pay day at the 1975 Winnipeg Folk Festival, which attracted in upwards of twenty-two thousand folk music enthusiasts. After his return performance on October 16, 1977, he flew back to Greenville in the same Convair CV-240 that rock band Lynyrd Skynyrd chartered from L&J Company of Addison, Texas, which ran out of fuel and crashed near McComb, Mississippi only a few days later on October 20, 1977. The plane crash made Chatmon skittish about airplane travel. As Winnipeg Folk Festival co-founder Mitch Podolak noticed, he “went by Greyhound to a lot of places” after the crash, including a third and final appearance in Winnipeg in 1978.\textsuperscript{1304}

Closer to home in Hollandale, Chatmon charged considerably less to perform at private events and local celebrations. While he might charge fifty dollars to play the local library during Black History Week, he would raise his rates to $75 for larger, more popular events, such as the 6\textsuperscript{th} annual Crosstie Arts Festival, which, in the opinion of one local reporter, was “known as one of the largest outdoor art displays in Mississippi.”\textsuperscript{1305} There was no need to gouge the

community organizers at MACE for higher fees, especially considering that the organization took steps to establish a cultural center and archives dedicated to study the culture of African Americans. “The payment of artists will always present a problem,” festival consultant and musicologist David Evans argued in his assessment of the inaugural festival, mainly because some local artists had never received much money or exposure while others had toured internationally and received large sums abroad.1306 Bobby Ray Watson and Elizabeth Thompson, however, possessed very little understanding of the kinship ties that existed within the black communities of the Delta, and they knew even less about the existing social networks of MACE and their affiliates. In addition, Watson has always been “kind of hot-headed,” and she has always considered herself a “warrior for what’s right.”1307 In their self-righteous misunderstanding, they took the blank contracts to the artists and “filled in more money for everybody.” Big Joe Williams, for example, signed a contract for two hundred dollars. Several artists signed contracts above the fifty dollar maximum with the approval of the couple, and it led to neither of them working on the subsequent event in 1979. It seems, however, that their defiance made an impression on the organizers of the event, because starting the following year every musician who took the stage received a wage of $250. Although the musicians’ were very happy, the steep increase may have helped forestall the main objective of the festival—financial support for the cultural education initiatives based out of the Greenville Blues Institute and Museum.

Hodding Carter III described the inaugural Delta Blues Festival as a “joyous celebration of a living Delta heritage,” which “seemed almost forgotten in the place it was born and raised.” On October 21, 1978, he declared, the blues was back home and “at the head of the table” in the

1307 Libby Rae Watson, interview by T. DeWayne Moore, September 29, 2013, Dublin, Mississippi.
“the region’s most important cultural event in memory.” For the editor, it “offered plenty of testimony” that the blues was “still a long way from dying.” He could not recall any event in the Delta “that ever made so many black folks and white folks so happy.”1308 The editor considered the festival an “extraordinary success,” largely due to the high turnout on Saturday, as well as an omen of the future success. The festival would soon become an annual affair that attracted even more spectators. Having instilled much hope and excitement about the blues in the Delta, MACE looked forward to establishing a center for the study and preservation of the blues in Greenville, a cultural institution that, according to Carter III’s editorial, deserved the only the “community’s strongest support.”

The initial festival had almost all of its amplification and mixing duties came as part of a donation to the festival. MACE had no expenses for the site, security, and sanitation, but the administration, publicity, and talent ended up being the big line items. The project director received four thousand. The field coordinator took seven thousand home from the project. The blues artists, in contrast, earned an estimated ten thousand for themselves. The total costs were $30,366 in 1978. The addition of site fees, professional audio/video equipment, and official programs in 1979, as well as the loss of the project director—previously the realm of Bobby Ray Watson and Libby Thompson—the expense report came to around forty thousand dollars the following year, and another six thousand dollar budget increase was inline for next year. To offset the rising costs of the festival, MACE raised the ticket price one dollar each year for the next several years, introduced merchandising, and increased the number of vendors allowed on site.

1308 “We’ve Got the Blues,” editorial, DDT, Oct 22, 1978, p.4
CONCLUSION

The initial Delta Blues Festival was not advertised as well as it would be in later years. In addition to the editorial and coverage in the *Delta Democrat Times*, several short articles and announcements made it into local newspapers such as *The Yazoo Herald, The Enterprise Tocsin, The Northside Sun, The Scott County Times*, and *The Magee Courier*. Notably, the *Clarksdale Press Register* and the *Greenwood Commonwealth* did not advertise the event, cover it, or even republish an *Associated Press* article about it. Former Freedom Democratic Party leader L.C. Dorsey covered the event for the African American newspaper, *The Jackson Advocate*, European blues enthusiast Hans Pehl compiled a brief review for the “Blues News” section of *Living Blues* magazine. A couple of his friends, moreover, told J. Eliot Broderick about the festival so that he could write his review for *Jackson* magazine, and Ellen Douglas provided the *Washington Post* with a glowing review that emphasized the diversity of the crowd and the authenticity of the traditions on display.

The Delta Blues Festival was similar to and distinguishable from other folk festivals and cultural displays. First, the festival emphasized reflecting the beauty of black culture in the Delta back into local communities. In addition, its economic impact was enormous on the lives of musicians, craftspeople, and the region as a whole from 1978 until 2000. The festival brought increasingly powerful tourism dollars to the mid-Delta and diverted them to Freedom Village. The Delta Blues Festival was also unique because it garnered almost immediate respect as a showcase of emerging black talent and for its living exhibitions of traditional culture. The festival featured a range of blues artists from longtime veterans and young turks to yodeling brakemen and nervous old guitar pickers, all of whom provided the festival with the power to
launch an artist into stardom. The power of the venue swelled even more due to the figures of the musicians themselves, older men and women, who played beautifully and stood as living ancestors for much of the contemporary popular music of 1970s America. The older musicians in Washington County served to ground the festival’s commercial and popular interests in incontestable claims to authenticity.

The Delta Blues Festival exhibited and displayed other elements of African American history and culture besides the blues. From the beginning, MACE employed scholars and professional folklorists to review the events, make suggestions, and consult with local people about ordering and defining their cultural programs. The influence of cultural authorities from different affiliates manifested in the festival’s location, musical lineup, and political imperatives, which might determine who, when, and how long someone appeared on stage.

MACE did much more than produce the festival. The nonprofit foundation helped artists secure additional paid engagements, supported and funded cultural education on the county level, and later introduced Blues in the Schools to thousands of school children each year through blues education programs. MACE’s work for community action and education buttressed the legitimacy of the organization to take action and promote the Delta blues. Since only a few blues musicians supported themselves with their music, the festival was sought after by those who would be defined by cultural display. The festival provided significant national and international opportunities for artists eager to reach a wider audience. The event itself was only a passing moment in 1978, but it came to loom large year-round for its numerous bids for power in the tourism industry and the appraisal of music’s value. The event was also a powerful source of identity and meaning for those who participate in its vernacular culture. These elements of the Delta Blues Festival make it a compelling event for further study.
Freedom Village was a space of hope and possibilities, or a constructed setting between producers and participants, which existed for the conferral of power. The social production of meaning at the Delta Blues Festival was determined by racialized and localized understandings of the blues, in which race and class are pervasive, even if only implied or unconscious. The racialized class structure of Greenville meant race also indexed class, allowing for their complete interconnectedness in the deployment of the folk. This dissertation, in a sense, has been about the power to define and produce the blues in Mississippi. Since whiteness and privilege are more about the power to include and exclude than the actual character and actions of those waiting to be included, the larger race/class power structure available to all white Americans empowered blues enthusiasts to envision their own definitions of the folk and the blues, while muting the voices of “others,” allowing for the creation of imagined, harmonious social realities within the borders of the festival site. More often than not, those imagined social realities did not transfer to the outside world. The economic incentives of promoting the blues in the Delta almost immediately outweighed the more high-minded goals of the Delta Arts Project, and, much like the Delta Foundation’s abandonment of social imperatives in the storm of the free market economy, the mere existence of the festival became paramount, regardless of how folks defined the blues.

Worth Long believed that the popularity of MACE and its power and influence in the black communities served as the foundations on which the annual festival tradition relied at first and later built upon. “MACE was a grassroots organization—not only in name but in terms of

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influence and power,” explained former Delta Arts Project director Vanessa Greene, who replaced K. Shalong Morgan in 1979. “MACE, at that point, was not one of these top-down organizations. The power at MACE went not only top-down but also bottom-up. All of the affiliates contributed to the development of the festival. That’s what made it so unique…It was rooted in—and reflective of—that whole Delta region.” The community action organization commanded serious respect in the region for its approach to community action. In its initial decade of existence, Ed Brown and Charles Bannerman also managed to embed its empowerment through action manifesto into the fabric of black communities all over the Delta. Long predicted early on that the festival, specifically its cultural education initiatives, had a good chance of becoming so embedded as well. It came down to trust. If the work of MACE did not “fit the value system of the community,” Long asserted, there is “no way you can start, but the fact that here was a black community organization from the very start that had deep roots in the community meant that it was just a matter of legitimizing the values that were already held by a community.”

The initial cultural awareness survey of members in various MACE affiliates suggested that the blues had almost disappeared from the cultural landscape of African Americans in the Delta. The impetus of middle class respectability and the influence of black cultural institutions also proved crucial factors in delegitimizing the blues in the deep South. Sank Powe, a former professional baseball player from around Leland, thought it was close to impossible for black folks in the Delta to develop a sincere appreciation of the blues as an important part of their cultural heritage. “I’m serious,” he declared, barely able to contain his laughter, “how can we really see the cultural heritage in this?” Having been repeatedly taught by parents and preachers, “You going to hell if you listen at the Blues,” he believed it would take a lot of hard work to
change the hardened attitudes of blacks about blues in the Delta. “You [are] going to have to do a lot of educating us to bring us up to date,” he told one historian, “We going to have to be educated some kind of way [and] somebody going to have to do some forums or something to educate blacks about the Blues and what this stuff means.” If “blacks got so much to offer in this Blues,” he admitted, “we just going to have to be retrained; retrain our thoughts about it. [But] until that time, I don’t know.”

From the very beginning, K. Shalong Morgan wanted to conduct workshops aimed at legitimizing the music in the black community and better understanding the blues as a reflection of the black experience. She had been trying tried to enlist the support of the Mississippi Humanities Council as early as the fall of 1977. To increase the level of understanding of the blues in the black community, MACE conducted several educational forums leading up to the festival to maximize the effectiveness of the Delta Arts Project in empowering its affiliates to action. MACE also started working to put together the next festival. In October 1978, Bannerman was not sure where it would be held, but he indicated the event might move to sites around the state. One fact was certain, however, he wanted it to “stay in the country.” K. Shalong Morgan moved forward with her plans to build up the archival and recorded collections for its archive in the former Elk’s Lodge. She contracted the services of David Evans in early 1979, and he conducted a series of field recordings with many of the artists who performed at the initial festival.

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1311 Sank Powe, interview by Charles C. Bolton, September 10, 1999, p.39, Mississippi Oral History Program of the University of Southern Mississippi.
1312 David Evans maintains possession of the original recordings and documents concerning the sessions and expenses over the course of a month.
Not long after the festival, however, K. Shalong Morgan married MACE attorney Keith Earley, gave birth to a son, and moved to New York. The Greenville Blues Institute and Museum never secured grant funds to continue building its archive. Considering that she went on to write the initial grant to establish the African American Caribbean Culture Center and Museum in Brooklyn, which committed itself to developing programming that highlighted the traditions and cultures of the African diaspora. In 1980, she decided to return to Freedom Village and co-emceed the festival with MACE founder Ed Brown. He had moved to Atlanta to direct the Voter Education Project and await the release of his brother, H. Rap Brown, who had converted to Islam in prison and emerged as Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin.

Citing a press release following the Delta Blues Festival in 1980, one student of blues tourism declared that the popularity of the festival increased and “attendance soared” to 10,000 people in 1980, which forced local officials to appreciate the festival’s role in stimulating the local economy via tourism. The statement is true in regards to the attention on MACE and the Delta Arts Project for its role in increasing the tourist industry potential of the blues, but attendance numbers did not soar in 1980. The size of the crowd had not yet surpassed the average attendance level (~10,000 people) of the annual Mainstream Festival. It was an

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1313 Shalong moved to Washington D.C. in 1981, and she performed at clubs such as Blues Alley and Charlie’s at the behest of the Charlin Jazz Society. She received a National Endowment for the Arts grant, which provided her the opportunity to work with veteran vocal accompanist John Malachi. In December 1986, she travelled with her support combo and the D.C. Contemporary Dance Company to Bangkok, Thailand. The three performing groups represented the American half of a cultural exchange; see, W. Royal Stokes, *Jazz Scene: An Informal History from New Orleans to 1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 186.


1315 He also cites the later grant proposal that Vanessa Greene, the second director of the Delta Arts Project, submitted in 1980 when explaining the original intentions of MACE for organizing cultural events, such the blues festival. In doing so, he overlooks the foundational work of K. Shalong Morgan (b. Karen Elaine League) and her crucial relationship with Bess Lomax Hawes, director of folk projects at the National Endowment for the Arts; see, “The Mississippi Action for Community Education Delta Arts Project—Background,” circa 1981, MACE, 119 South Theobald Street, Greenville, Mississippi, 38701.
important event that brought the founders of both MACE and the Delta Arts Project back to the Delta, not because of a substantial rise in attendance.

The attendance levels at the Delta Blues Festival first soared at Freedom Village in 1981 and continued to attract even larger crowds in the ensuing years. As many as 5,600 people came in 1978; in upwards of 7,500 in 1979; and as high as 9,500 in 1980. The total rise in attendance from 1978-1980 was 3,900. As opposed to the initial three festivals, which experienced steady, yet moderate, levels of growth, attendance levels soared to 18,000 in 1981. It shot up to an estimated 29,000 in 1982, and it grew to 35,000 in 1984. By this time, the tourism brokers in Mississippi, such as Carnegie Public Library director Sydney Foster Graves, had realized the economic viability of a heritage tourism industry based on traditional black music. Some of them, like Graves, made an investment in blues tourism in the aftermath of the good press about the Delta Blues Festival. He founded the Delta Blues Museum in early 1979. Graves received the guidance of Bill Ferris in matters relating to the blues and exhibitions of traditional artwork, but he failed to attract support for the fledgling institution for almost a decade.

One potential theory about the causes of the sudden increase in attendance might be the city of Greenville’s discontinuation of the Mainstream Festival after the increased attendance of African Americans. The brokers of official power in Washington County turned away from the economic and social incentives of music and arts festivals at the very time of their explosion in popularity in Mississippi. The increased attendance levels in 1981 might also be attributed to the sponsorship of the Miller Brewing Company, or the headlining performance of Muddy Waters. The surprise appearance of Johnny Winter on stage with Waters in front of almost twenty thousand people at Freedom Village was a carefully organized spectacle that rose about during Delta Rock Festival promoter Mike Ward’s tenure as a grant writer for MACE. Malcolm Walls,
the third director of the Delta Arts Project, managed to accomplish what neither K. Shalong Morgan nor Vanessa Greene could bring about when he booked Muddy Waters to headline in 1981. The reactions of blues enthusiasts to the image of interracial brotherhood between two native Mississippians who grew up on different sides of the tracks and now were playing on the same stage proved a powerful image around which to build a promotional campaign encouraging people to purchase tickets and recognize the importance of African American contributions to American society.

The perhaps a little too hopeful Mississippi Economic Council (MEC) predicted the state would experience an economic boom after the positive press coverage of the festival in November 1978. Though the “almost intangible and often immeasurable problem” of the state’s negative image—both externally and internally—remained its fundamental “stumbling block” when hoping to attract industrial developers and big business, the state’s violent reputation of intransigent racism and continuing resistance to racial integration through both discriminatory municipal electoral processes and the emergence of private segregation academies created a conspicuous lack of appealing qualities.1316 The state was not going to help bring about racial equality. Instead of embracing more egalitarian policies and embracing racial equality “with all deliberate speed,” the Magnolia State looked to the Mississippi Economic Council and its three-step psychological campaign to repair its image problem. Unwilling to fulfill the promises of the civil rights movement, the state continued to impede the political and social progress of blacks and simply hoped to attract new industries anyway. The campaign required that the nation’s attention turn away from its continuing racial inequalities, gut-wrenching level of poverty, and technically integrated public school system. MEC already had its first step taken for them

towards achieving the goal through the construction of a positive mental image of the state, which the positive reviews of and experiences at the DBF had largely accomplished in late 1978. Almost all of the writers who reviewed and popularized the festival also promoted a spirit of racial progress, citing its slightly integrated audience—as much as ninety percent black.

The popularity of the festival also fulfilled the second step: to project that image to other people outside the state. K. Shalong Morgan publicized the 1978 DBF in Delta Democrat Times and regional newspapers, such as the *Jackson Advocate* and the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, but she also got famous and native author Ellen Douglas to review the event for the Washington Post. MACE had intended to make most of its money selling tickets for the Albert King show later that evening, which proved a lucrative move, but despite the lack of advance national and even international publicity, the word still got around to the friends of some reviewers such as Jackson writer and musician J. Elliot Broderick, who published several pages in Jackson magazine about the “flat-out incredible” event.\(^{1317}\) Hans Pehl, a European blues enthusiast who sometimes reported blues news to Living Blues magazine, also heard about it through word of mouth and managed to attend the event and send a brief review to his unknowing editor, Jim O’Neal, in November 1978. Having driven through the state several times to visit his family in Mobile, O’Neal was no stranger and “always liked going to Mississippi for whatever reason,” whether it was to interview artists or visit the juke joints. Once he learned of the festival, with Alan Lomax and Worth Long presenting several artists who recently recorded for the documentary, *The Land Where the Blues Began*, the enthusiastic editor decided to make the trip the following year.\(^{1318}\) Even the French blues scholar Robert Springer made a trip across the pond to catch emcee Willie Dixon in 1979.

\(^{1318}\) Jim O’Neal, interview by T. DeWayne Moore, April 11, 2014.
Regardless of the educational intentions of MACE and the MEA consultants, the media’s celebratory reviews of the festival as a beautiful interracial gathering that imbued the state with a reformist image, particularly in their own minds, a discursive strategy which allowed for the virtuous inward reinforcement of the state’s imagined positive value. Once some Mississippians made commitments to that progressive new image, the positive sense of mission and attitudes showed in their posture, manner, and mood, which in turn projected an attractive representation of available resources and opportunity in Mississippi.\footnote{To gain even greater control over the “decision-making and image-making process,” the MEC suggested that strong, confident men of conviction get involved in politics. One important method of improving the state’s image, after all, was the election of “responsible, dynamic, and aggressive leaders” at both the local and national levels. The whole campaign to promote the progressive new image of Mississippi apparently hinged on the election of individuals who would continue to distance themselves from the needs of African Americans, while at the same time putting on a front, with the hopeful cooperation of certain prominent African American leaders, who also wanted to make the state more attractive to new industrial enterprises and conducive to the growth of small business.

MACE chairman Charles Bannerman also served as executive director of the Delta Foundation, which loaned start-up funds to labor-intensive, for-profit businesses to provide employment opportunities in the Delta. The confident and intimidating swagger of shrewd business leader Charles Bannerman was subdued over the course of the conservative 1980s administration of President Ronald Reagan. In 1982, Bannerman persuaded one of his girlfriends in network television to cover the Mississippi Legislature during one session and vote over funding for Governor William Winter, who put together a coalition made up of working  

\footnote{“Positive Image Needed Here,” \textit{Leland (MS) Progress}, Nov 9, 1978, p.4.}
class black and white Mississippians, the middle class, and business leaders to transform the image of Mississippi and achieve a landmark legislative accomplishment in passage of the Education Reform Act in 1982. Winter mobilized public opinion and Bannerman secured the national media attention, both of them pushing reluctant legislators to support a bill that provided public kindergartens, reading aides, a teacher pay raise, and new requirements for teacher certification. The “Christmas Miracle,” as it became known, passed in a special legislative session in December 1982. That moment, in my opinion, does not represent “a racial turning point for the state” so much as it does the death throes of racially moderate wing of the Democratic Party—hold-outs from the Jim Crow era whose defeat came from racial hardliners across the aisle.

The continued dominance of state politics by white conservatives and the resilience of the “plantation mentality” among African Americans, according to historian Kim Lacy Rogers, proved a treacherous socio-political setting as local blacks began attaining some political clout. During the 1970s, several black elected officials rose to power in Mississippi. Even in counties that elected a majority of black candidates to the controlling bodies of local governance, these African American men and women were extremely limited in their abilities to effect change. The dearth of both local capital and investment opportunities led to the dependence of majority-black communities upon federal or state funds for improvements in local housing, education, public facilities, and employment opportunities. The small black middle class of the Jim Crow era, moreover, turned into a bureaucratic and public-service middle class in the 1980s, and the number of black skilled professionals who win contracts and work on state, county, and federal jobs remained limited. Further, the lack of widespread improvement in employment

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opportunities and wage rates meant that working-class and poor African Americans could not see significant, on-the-ground changes made by their votes, or by their officials. “All the blame is falling down on” the shoulders of black elected officials,” Gray exclaimed, “which is destroying the confidence that your own people have in you.”1321

This dissertation also assesses how African Americans in the Delta used resources and programs in strategic and politically significant ways. It details how antipoverty activists, community and economic development groups, and education reform movements made innovative interpretative usage of both the blues and black power. The most common way was the appropriation of certain elements that agreed with their own agenda for community action, forging alliances with fellow activists and groups from across the political spectrum in the process. The issues of race, however, remained pronounced at the festival. The lack of understanding and thereby support for the blues as politics (or as black history) was rejected almost immediately in Mississippi. The white representatives of the press were focused on repairing the image of the state as a lawless backwater populated by rednecks.

By demonstrating the ways African Americans merged programs of cultural enrichment and institution building while they used public policies to empower and revitalize their communities, this dissertation illuminates the development of blues tourism at the grassroots level as well as the mainstreaming of the blues long before the establishment of the Blues Commission. This dissertation also predicts that corporate sponsors—aimed at reforming Black Power and subverting radical black politics—played an important and misunderstood role in exacerbating inequality among African Americans from the 1980s onward. As their policies became entrenched in the region, MACE succeeded in expanding opportunity for upwardly...

mobile, middle-class and elite blacks, but the interests of poor and working-class blacks were delegitimized in public polling and broader political discourse. This story of black middle-class success and growing disadvantage for poor and working-class African Americans is one that reveals the power of white interests—acting in concert with elements of the black community and in response to the pressures of black activism more generally—to define the limits and nature of racial progress, not to mention a lack of emphasis on the most important element of the blues for African Americans today, one that carries its provenance in the black freedom struggle.
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MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS (ABBREVIATIONS)

Baroni Collection Marge Baroni Collection, University of Mississippi Department of Archives and Special Collections

Carawan Papers Guy and Candie Carawan Papers, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, Southern Historical Collection

466
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468
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