Moving the Monument: The University of Mississippi’s Decades-Long Journey to Relocate Its Confederate Monument

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MOVING THE MONUMENT: THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI'S
DECADES-LONG JOURNEY TO RELOCATE ITS CONFEDERATE MONUMENT

By Hadley Hitson

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford, Mississippi
April 2021

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis has been a decade in the making — from a memory I have of being 11 years old and learning that Ole Miss was ridding itself of Colonel Reb to conversations I’ve had as recently as last December. Included in these chapters is a story that I am honored to tell, one of courage, fear and progress.

I would like to thank Cynthia Joyce for her guidance and editing. I’m not sure I would have even been motivated to finish this project without your help. Thank you for pushing me to go beyond the obvious, to trust myself as a reporter and to tell the truth above all else.

To the past, present and future staff of The Daily Mississippian, thank you for teaching me to report with vigor and holding me to high (but hopefully achievable) expectations.

To my family and friends, thank you for listening to me ramble about the Confederate monument and other controversies at this university for hours on end. Without your encouragement, support and time, I would never have been in the position to write this.

Lastly, to The University of Mississippi, thank you for being a place of progress — for showing me that change is never finished and even monuments can move.
ABSTRACT

Moving the Monument: The University of Mississippi’s Decades-Long Journey to Relocate Its Confederate Monument

(Under the direction of Cynthia Joyce)

This thesis tells the story of how thousands of students, faculty, staff, alumni and other members of the university community banded together to relocate The University of Mississippi’s Confederate monument. The movement for relocation officially began in the spring of 2019 with the unanimous vote by the Associated Student Body Senate to move the monument to UM’s Confederate cemetery, but long before that, change happened at the university that paved the way.

This creative telling of recent history explains how national and local events — including pro-Confederate marches in Oxford and the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis — brought the university to move its Confederate monument from a prominent place in the heart of campus to the more appropriate Confederate cemetery on the outskirts of university property.

I spoke with over 100 members of the university community from November 2018 to the present while reporting on the monument for The Daily Mississippian, UM’s independent student newspaper. Thousands of people read those articles as they were published, and this narrative collectively addresses the community reaction as events unfolded.
PREFACE

The first time I realized the significance of the towering marble soldier that stood on The University of Mississippi campus was in February of 2019. As pro-Confederate groups from across the southeast descended onto the Circle advocating for the monument to stay in place, I witnessed the vitriol, distress and confusion that surrounded Confederate symbols, their history and their place in modern America.

Since then, I have researched and interviewed over 100 members of the UM community on the topic and authored dozens of articles along the way for publication in The Daily Mississippian. As a student journalist at the university, I followed the student push for relocation from quiet conversations to the monument’s new site outside of the Confederate cemetery on campus. This thesis explores how the historic relocation came to fruition and how the monument continues to impact both the university’s image and its community.

Across the South, these symbols act as pain points: a Confederate monument downtown, a flag waving on a front porch, remnants of the Old South cropping up in Greek life. Every emblem of the Confederacy that persists acts as a reminder of more than just the Civil War. They memorialize the antebellum South and its values, and many of these symbols, including UM’s Confederate monument, attempt to honor revisionist history by commemorating Confederate soldiers as heroes fighting for what was right.

This is the story of how eight students successfully incited a movement of thousands to relocate the Confederate monument that had watched over the entrance to The University of Mississippi for over 114 years.
The relocation of The University of Mississippi’s Confederate monument from the Circle to the Confederate cemetery on July 14, 2020, was widely viewed as a pivotal accomplishment for students and faculty who have fought for reconciliation with the university’s racially divided and violent past over the course of decades. However, there is much historic precedent for the relocation and removal of such monuments, and many researchers have attempted to understand the historical context and importance of these symbols. In order to understand what this monument meant to the UM community, it is important to understand how Confederate monuments became integrated into Southern towns and universities, and furthermore, why it has become increasingly important to either contextualize them, relocate them or remove them altogether.

The History of UM’s Monument:

For 114 years prior to its relocation, the monument stood as one of the most notable odes to the Confederacy and the Lost Cause ideology in the state of Mississippi — at the heart of its flagship university. It was erected in 1906 by the local chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), a women’s association dedicated to the commemoration of Confederate Civil War soldiers. With the exception of the nameless infantryman, the monument is constructed of the same marble from which the figure of Abraham Lincoln located inside of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. was carved: that of the Tate marble quarries in Pickens County, Georgia. The soldier himself was carved by similarly nameless Italian sculptors from a marble...
pit in Carrara, Italy. The central purpose of the monument when it was dedicated, as stated by the UDC chapter’s historian Nellie Durham Deupree, was to remember “the valiant heroes of Lafayette County” who died serving the Confederacy and facing inevitable defeat. “Their deeds of valor,” she wrote, “are forever stamped on the memory of the fair women of Mississippi, who . . . preserve and perpetuate the memorial flame of love and patriotism for the great cause that was overwhelmed, not lost; overpowered, not defeated.” The so-called “great cause” that these women were passionate about was, in fact, the Lost Cause ideology, which asserts that the Confederate fight was valiant and just.

This was one of over 300 Confederate monuments erected by local UDC chapters across Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and South Carolina from 1865-1980, all of which were divided into two groups based on their location: in cemeteries or in public parks, squares or gathering places. Monuments erected along major transportation arteries — such as the entrance to a university — or on public property, especially a courthouse square, often contained an implicit political message or component, according to political science professor James Michael Martinez and his colleagues who authored a series of essays titled “Confederate Symbols in the Contemporary South.”

This implicit political message was made explicit by Deupree when she stated the UDC’s “purpose” in its memorialization work, which included the university’s Confederate monument. It was “to hold aside the curtain of memory that those who will may read the story as it was written — as it was lived — in the bitter days of war and reconstruction,” she said. Ironically, though, the curtain of memory had already fallen over many of these women themselves, as it had been more than 40 years since their ancestors had fought for the Confederacy. Deupree continued to say that the social advancements Black people saw during Reconstruction were “tragic mistakes” that humiliated white Southerners like herself.
On the other hand, the Confederate monuments put up in cemeteries and around gravesites were widely intended to depict the “sad history” of the Civil War — not “to champion a political cause, but to commemorate soldiers who died in battle,” according to the essays published by Martinez and William Richardson. Thus, over a century later, when university community members contended that the monument would better serve the purpose of memorializing those who died in battle rather than the battle itself from a new location in the cemetery, the argument fell in line with historical intentions.

*The Lost Cause and Its Impact on UM:*

In order to better understand the context of the university’s Confederate monument and the grounds for its relocation, one must understand the values and beliefs that the women who erected it were attempting to memorialize. The Lost Cause ideology — that which Confederate monuments erected during the late 19th and early 20th centuries stand to commemorate — asserts that the antebellum South was a paradise. The South seceded to protect states' constitutional rights, and the North defeated the Confederate's superior military ability because of overwhelming resources. It views Reconstruction as a period of corrupt administration by the vengeful North, the ignorant freedmen and the traitorous Southerners. The Lost Cause also contends that this injustice was only corrected when white Southerners regained control of their state governments.

Because the continued erection of monuments and implementation of Lost Cause symbolism ended in the 1920s, most scholarly research stops here as well. However, the cultural significance of the Lost Cause and the perpetuation of its intentions did not stop then. Prior to the monument’s relocation, members of the university history department asserted that the location
of the monument in the center of campus suggested “an eagerness among the administration to embrace the Lost Cause ideology and white supremacy.”

Apart from even the monument, though, many other examples of the Lost Cause romanticization of the antebellum South can be seen throughout past decades of the university’s history. In 1897, as Southern states were fine tuning Jim Crow laws, the university yearbook chose the moniker “Ole Miss” as a way of reflecting “back upon the presumed ease of plantation relations.” This was the traditional title used by slaves for the mistress of a plantation, and thus, the name perpetuated the Lost Cause idea of antebellum ideals lost with the Civil War. Even in 1962 as U.S. District Judge Sidney Mize ordered the university to admit James Meredith as its first Black student, then Gov. Ross Barnett invoked those who fought for the Confederacy as patriots: Barnett asked Mississippians “whether, in this crisis, we will exhibit the same courage, the same devotion to deathless principle and the same determination to guarantee the blessings of liberty to future generations as was shown by those patriots who have gone before?” This belief that the pre-Civil War era was, in some ways, a time to aspire to originated from the Lost Cause ideology, echoes of which can still be seen across the South and at The University of Mississippi today.

*Other Confederate Monuments and Attempts to Move Them:*

On June 17, 2015, Dylann Roof murdered nine people in a Charleston church in an attempt to start a “race war.” Three days after the mass shooting, photos surfaced of him posing with the Confederate battle flag, and seven days later, Bree Newsome Bass scaled the State Capitol building in Columbia, South Carolina, to remove the Confederate battle flag that had flown there for 54 years. Police officers promptly arrested Newsome Bass and replaced the flag,
but her act of public disobedience catalyzed lawmakers across the nation to move to rid their communities of public Confederate symbols. On July 10, 2015, the Confederate flag was removed from the South Carolina statehouse grounds for good.

During that year alone, there were more than 100 attempts at the state and local levels to remove the symbols or add features to provide more historical context. For example, in Memphis, the City Council voted quickly to remove a statue of Nathan Bedford Forrest, the Confederate general who oversaw the massacre of black Union soldiers and became a Ku Klux Klan leader after the Civil War, from the centrally located Forrest Park.

*What It Means:*

By following the history of the Lost Cause, specifically on The University of Mississippi campus, tracking the racial progress that the university has made over the last century and comparing the progression of UM’s monument relocation to others in the country, it is clear that the relocation was inevitable.

Historically, Mississippi tends to fall behind the pack when it comes to social and racial progress, as seen in the way the state handled abolishing slavery, integration and many instances of violent racism. From 1882-1968, the state saw more lynchings than any other with 581 total. Because of this history, when Mississippians make changes to move closer to an equal and equitable society, it is often symbolic of the entire nation’s advancement, as well. If Mississippi is in last place in terms of racial parity, then it acts as the barometer for progress in the United States. Moving The University of Mississippi’s Confederate monument signified more than just change on a college campus deeply ingrained in Southern tradition; the relocation was emblematic of nationwide momentum.
As the sun rose over The University of Mississippi campus on July 14, 2020, McCarty King Construction Company workers began taking apart the Confederate monument that had stood at the entrance to the university since its dedication by the local chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy in 1906. First, a worker sawed off the life-sized, unnamed soldier. Next came the short base, then the primary monument structure and its brick pedestal and lastly, the plaque describing the context of the monument’s existence. By the time the sun set that day, the monument in pieces was relocated to its new resting place outside of the Confederate cemetery on the outskirts of campus.

Greg Mitchell, a university alumnus who graduated in 1974, watched as the concrete pieces of the monument were brought to their new location. He reminisced on the state of the university when he was a student — waving Confederate flags at football games, hearing “Dixie” and seeing a racially divided student body. To him, the relocation was long awaited. “I have chill bumps,” he said. “Watching the university change is really something.” Even as bystanders like Mitchell admired the university’s progress, other community members were unhappy.

Just as the physical relocation had been kept a secret, many of the students, faculty and alumni who had fought for the relocation felt as though university administrators had kept their plans for the statue’s new place on campus close to their chests. Shortly after the state college board voted on June 18 to authorize The University of Mississippi to relocate the monument, students, professors and community members discovered that included on the last page of the 156-page proposal that Chancellor Glenn Boyce sent to the college board were two renderings of
the renovated Confederate cemetery, which showed headstones installed in the cemetery, a newly laid brick path leading to the relocated monument, benches around the cemetery and intricate landscaping. These images fueled the outrage among community members who supported relocation and led to accusations that the university was turning the cemetery into a “shrine to the Confederacy.”

The university’s proposal listed the Associated Student Body, the Ole Miss Alumni Association, the UM Foundation, Ole Miss Athletics Foundation and all three university Greek councils among those who had provided “written endorsement” for the plan. However, ASB leadership later released a statement saying they were never made aware of these plans “to beautify the Confederate cemetery,” and if they were, they would not have approved. “Student advocacy has solely centered around moving the Confederate statue into the Confederate cemetery,” the statement said. “We stand by our student body and look forward to working with the university to address these issues. Relocation, not Glorification.”

The project was set to cost approximately $1.15 million and be funded privately. Several of the students who authored the original resolution to relocate the monument, which the ASB Senate passed unanimously in March 2019, did not approve of the university’s plans either. Senior international studies major Katie Dames, senior Arabic major Charlotte Armistead, and alumni Arielle Hudson, Jarvis Benson, John Chappell and Leah Davis released a joint statement saying the university’s proposal glorifies the Confederacy. “As the authors of the initial resolution, we strongly oppose any measures that would uplift white supremacist narratives or glorify the Confederacy,” the statement read. “The unanimously passed resolution called for relocating the monument to a less prominent place on campus. We did not co-sign onto a project beautifying the Lost Cause.”
In addition to falsely noting ASB’s support, Boyce pointed to recommendations that were issued by the Chancellor’s Advisory Committee on History and Context (CACHC) on June 16, 2017, in an effort to explain the origin of the controversial details of the plan. The committee members also released a statement condemning the plans and clarifying that they were not the proprietors. “To utilize the work of the CACHC without consulting all the original members of the CACHC, the University’s stakeholders, including current students and student leaders, and to proceed without the sanction of the National Cemetery Administration violates the spirit and the letter of the work,” the statement read. “The CACHC represented an effort to commit to ‘honest and open dialogue about our history… informed by expertise and conducted with respectful candor.’ These are the principles we embraced in our work, and believe must be upheld in any attempt to implement our recommendations.”

Carl Tart, the university’s first homecoming king, was among the alumni who took to social media to express disdain. In a thread on Twitter that included the university’s renderings of the updated cemetery, Tart said he could no longer help the university recruit minority students if a shrine commemorating the Confederacy was erected. “I am not your token Black person, and I will not stand for the continued disrespect to Black and brown students on that campus, from statues, to leadership, to student organizations. Take that 168 page, $1M plan, and BURN IT,” one of Tart’s tweets read.

All of the high-strung emotions that the community felt when the plans came out still remained on the day of relocation. University administrators mostly stayed silent during what was almost a month between the release of the cemetery plans and the monument’s actual relocation, even as protesters marched on campus and hundreds of community members took to social media to criticize the university plans. At one point, a university spokesman said the university’s plans were evolving, but Boyce would not publicly address these concerns. For this
reason, the only thing that many students could focus on when relocation occurred was the so-called Confederate shrine they assumed was on its way to fruition. “I’m happy about the statue finally being moved, but don’t let that distract you from the fact that we still don’t know if headstones will inappropriately be built in the cemetery,” Associated Student Body President Joshua Mannery said that day.

That afternoon, the chancellor finally sent a statement that said the university would not allow excavation within the cemetery, and Boyce said he was not willing to risk damaging the remains of the Confederate and Union soldiers who are buried there. This statement was a complete about-face from his previous support for the headstone installation, causing many community members to question whether Boyce was making the decisions himself or following the direction of influential alumni who backed the project. Days later, on July 17, Boyce confirmed that no headstones would be added to the cemetery, and the only renovations made came in the form of sidewalk installation for ADA compliance and security cameras to monitor the monument.

Boyce also explicitly took responsibility and apologized for the concerns that resulted from the relocation plans, but the apology came after hundreds of Mississippians, alumni and students criticized the plan as a shrine to the Lost Cause. “From the outset of my involvement in this project, my goal has been to relocate the monument from the Circle in the heart of our campus to a more suitable location on campus in accordance with state law. We have done that,” Boyce said in the statement. “At the same time, I must acknowledge that some aspects of the execution of this project have not been handled as well as I would have liked.”
Before thousands of UM community members stepped up in support of relocation, before any chancellor publicly agreed that a symbol of the Confederacy did not belong in the center of campus and before national media descended upon the monument, there were eight students.

In January of 2019, Katie Dames, Jarvis Benson, Charlotte Armistead, Arielle Hudson, Leah Davis, Tyler Yarborough, John Chappell and Dalton Hull established their joint goal to remove the university’s Confederate monument from its central location in the Circle. After months of individual conversations about the university’s complex racial history, the suggested values that the monument promoted and its negative impact on students, Dames was fed up. Motivated by her determination to see concrete signs of progress during her time at the university, Dames gathered the group of multicultural, bipartisan students and made a plan.

“I just decided, ‘Let’s get everybody together in a group message,’ and we started talking about everything from there,” Dames said. “It was scary because there were online threats that were directed toward individuals and specific groups, and we were concerned that they might take action or make the same threats toward us.” Another student group, Students Against Social Injustices, had protested for the removal of the monument months earlier on campus, and those who were present continued to receive harassment and threats over social media.

Around that same time in mid-January, the city of Oxford approved a protest permit for two pro-Confederate groups who had members present at the 2017 Charlottesville riots. The two groups — Confederate 901 and the Hiwaymen — planned to march from the Oxford Square onto the university campus and rally around the Confederate monument to protest the removal of Confederate symbols from prominent locations in the South on Feb. 23.
“We’re taking a stand for Ole Miss values, such as the Confederate monument and the Mississippi state flag,” said Billy Sessions, one of the protest organizers, to a reporter for The Daily Mississippian. Sessions, like many of the other protesters, was not a university alumnus or parent of a UM student. Less than two years prior to his march on Oxford, Sessions had marched on another college town to defend the location of another Confederate monument. That rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, was met by crowds of counter-protesters and resulted in at least three deaths, dozens of injuries and an issued state of emergency by then Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe.

As The University of Mississippi prepared for an unknown number of Confederates to descend upon Oxford, Dames and her peers kept quiet about their intentions to do exactly what Confederate 901 and the Hiwaymen were adamantly against. The fear that Dames felt intensified across the community leading up to the Confederate march, and the university administration’s reaction only proved that students were right to be panicked.

Days before the groups were expected to arrive in Oxford, the university announced that it had completed the process of bringing its weapons policy into compliance with the state’s law on gun permits, meaning that people who have enhanced concealed carry permits would now be allowed to carry firearms on campus as long as they are not entering university buildings.

“Mississippi has very liberal gun legislation,” said UM general counsel Erica McKinley at a university forum that week. “It is a rather unfortunate, and frankly damning, coincidence that when we realized and got aligned on that policy, we issued it when we did.” Leaders of the Confederate groups said that they would refrain from bringing firearms with them to the protest, but their assertions were not enough to calm the community.

Interim Chancellor Larry Sparks issued several statements insisting that the university did not change its policies “to accomodate any group,” and in these same emails, he said “the
The university’s administration condemns racism, bigotry and hatred.” The University Police Department urged the community to avoid being on campus when the groups would be present, and it increased security on campus throughout that week. “I want to stress that we are committed to maintaining a safe environment and have consulted with local and state law enforcement agencies drawing on their expertise and resources,” UPD Chief Ray Hawkins said in a campus-wide email. “The best thing you can do to help keep our campus safe is to stay away from this area of campus on Saturday, February 23.”

Of course, the university’s warnings did not stop large groups of counter protesters and several local journalists from gathering in the Circle on Feb. 23, waiting for the Confederate supporters to approach. When they did, shouting, chanting and singing began. In front of the monument, the pro-Confederate groups yelled, “Protect our heritage,” and raised signs that read “God Bless Dixie” and “Say no to socialism.” Behind the monument, counter protesters sang civil rights anthems like “A Change is Gonna Come.” Some raised their fists in the air and formed hearts with their hands, while others stuck out a middle finger.

At the same time as the march, the Ole Miss men’s basketball team was preparing to take on the Georgia Bulldogs in the Pavilion on campus. When the national anthem began, eight Rebel players knelt to the ground. Brian Hallum, Devontae Shuler, Breein Tyree, Luis Rodriguez, KJ Buffen, D.C. Davis, Bruce Stevens and Franco Miller Jr. became the first men’s college basketball players at a major university to do so since NFL players began kneeling to protest police brutality and racism in 2016. The players knelt in direct response to the Confederate rally. “We’re just tired of these hate groups coming to our school and portraying our campus, our actual university, as having these hate groups in our school,” Tyree said in a postgame press conference. While the hours-long Confederate march dominated the city of
Oxford that day, the basketball players’ 63 seconds of kneeling overshadowed it in national and local headlines.

Though Feb. 23 was chaotic and tension-filled, it passed peacefully, and within the following weeks, the students who were secretly plotting to relocate the monument saw their plan come to a head — not as a result of the protests, but in spite of them.

Dames, Benson, Armistead, Hudson, Davis, Yarborough, Chappell and Hull had spent weeks researching state law and meeting privately with historians, administrators and a select group of other students to chart a plan for relocating the monument. They decided that the most powerful move they could make would be to author and pass a resolution in the Associated Student Body Senate calling for the relocation of the Confederate monument in the Lyceum-Circle Historic District to the Confederate cemetery on campus. On the evening of March 6, 2019, university policemen guarded the doors to Lamar Hall as community members, students, pro-Confederates from across the southeast and student government senators crowded into a lecture hall for the ASB vote.

“Over the past couple of weeks, there have been a lot of arguments and a lot of yelling and a lot of fear among the community and among our students,” Dames said when introducing the resolution. “What we hope to do by introducing this legislation is to create a conversation so that people will listen.” The resolution asserted that Confederate ideology “directly violates the tenets of the University Creed that support fairness, civility and respect for the dignity of each person.” It also recognized The University of Mississippi’s “complex history in regards to slavery, injustice and race that negatively impacts current students,” and due to these facts, it said the placement of the Confederate monument in the heart of campus undermined the university’s “mission to maintain an inclusive and safe environment.”
The Oxford community had experienced weeks of arguments and dozens of protests for and against relocation by the time the resolution came to the ASB Senate floor in March of 2019. Thus, once the student senators voted and ASB Vice President Walker Abel approached the podium to announce the final decision, the crowd fell into an anxious silence. After 10 seconds that seemed to pass in slow motion, the room erupted into applause and joyous tears. The resolution passed. Surrounded by students, community members and a few university police officers, the Ole Miss Associated Student Body Senate unanimously called for the relocation of the Confederate statue from the Circle to the Confederate cemetery.

“This is not what I expected,” John Chappell, president of College Democrats and co-author of the resolution, said immediately following the passage. “I didn’t think it was going to be unanimous, but this shows that the university, the student body as a whole, is sending a strong message that this statue does not represent us.” Not everyone in the room was content, though. Several members of pro-Confederate groups were in attendance, and when Abel announced the decision, they promptly stormed out of the room.

Chappell and his co-writers on the resolution were fearful coming into the vote, concerned that their peers would not understand or feel as strongly about the need to move the Confederate statue to a more appropriate location than the heart of the Ole Miss campus. “This is a big moment, and it’s a big moment for African-American students especially,” said Benson, who was a co-author and also then-president of the Black Student Union. “Fifty years ago, we couldn’t be here. Twenty years ago, this definitely wouldn’t have passed. Five years ago, I don’t even think this would have passed.” The vote was not a final decision on the fate of the monument, and ASB recognized that fact. Still, it was the definitive first step toward their final goal, and they executed it without a hitch.
Nonetheless, sentiment across the UM community was not unanimous, and many people did not understand the purpose of moving the monument. “I know there have been lots of questions about whether we are trying to erase history, and that is simply not our goal,” Dames said on the day that the ASB Senate was to vote. “Our goal is to move history to a place where it is contextually appropriate so that we can begin to have conversations without yelling at each other and (without) having this beacon of conflict in the center of our campus.”

They had anticipated criticism, though, and prior to drafting their resolution, one of the main questions that Dames and her peers sought to answer was why the Chancellor’s Advisory Committee on History and Context (CACHC) never considered moving the statue when it was undergoing the process to contextualize other problematic symbols and names on campus. Former Chancellor Jeffrey Vitter originally established the CACHC in March of 2016 and charged its 14 members — including knowledgeable faculty, influential alumni and the ASB president — to identify and contextualize all relevant sites on campus. Dames met with at least two former members of the CACHC, one of whom informed her that Vitter explicitly prohibited the committee from discussing the location of the Confederate statue. To show their support for the relocation, though, a majority of the former members of the CACHC sent a letter in support to the ASB Senate prior to its vote.

While all student body senators who were present voted in affirmation of the resolution, at least two did not attend the meeting. Several also stood to speak in support because, as many of them would later say, they assumed that some of the senators needed convincing. “Relocating the statue isn’t going to change what has happened in our history,” student senator J.R. Riojas said. “But we have a very rare opportunity right now. We have the opportunity to be on the right side of history.” Barron Mayfield, who served as an Ole Miss Ambassador and became the ASB president in 2019, said he avoids leading his tour groups directly past the statue. “When we walk
by it, people gawk, and they gasp,” Mayfield said. “It’s embarrassing. Why would we want anything that’s embarrassing, that turns people away, that makes people feel unwelcome on this campus?” Mayfield aptly pointed out that allowing Confederate symbols to remain prominently displayed on The University of Mississippi’s campus not only misrepresents what he would assert as “Ole Miss values,” but it justifies outsiders’ negative judgements of the university.

A week prior to the vote, ASB publicly released the resolution in order to hear feedback from the student body, and in that time, the ASB Senate received a total of 164 constituent comments, of which 57.9% were favorable and 31.7% were unfavorable. Many constituent comments suggested that ASB hold a referendum, or a student vote on the topic, but Dames said they deliberately chose to pass a resolution instead of turning the decision entirely over to the students in order to comply with the authors’ understanding of Mississippi law, which allows for a “governing body” to decide upon relocation of the Confederate statue. At the time of the vote, the public, including university officials themselves, were unclear on exactly what constituted the “governing body” that had the power to relocate. Chappell and the other authors of the resolution claimed that the ASB Senate is part of the governing body of the Ole Miss campus because of the shared governance model of the university. Under this model, the other groups who share governance are the Graduate Student Council, the Staff Council and the Senate of the Faculty.

In anticipation and support of the ASB vote, the GSC Senate also passed a resolution calling for the monument’s relocation on Monday, March 4, 2019; the Staff Council followed suit on March, 6; and the Senate of the Faculty did the same on Thursday, March 7. The Graduate Student Council Senate passed its resolution with 15 senators approving, four voting against and one abstaining. Tom Porter authored the resolution alongside fellow GSC senators Hooper Schultz and Mary Berman, expecting all other bodies of the university's shared
governance to do the same. “This doesn’t exist without ASB,” Porter said. “They put it on our radar, and at that point, we felt comfortable that if ASB is going to talk about it, we should have this discussion, too.”

The GSC resolution was essentially the same as the ASB Senate resolution, but the most notable difference lies in the GSC’s addition of a line to “disavow white supremacy” and “stand in solidarity with UM student groups” like the Black Student Union and Students Against Social Injustice. “Over the last three and a half weeks or so, groups like SASI have been written out of the grander narrative,” Porter said. “We see these student groups who are working to build a better campus, a more inclusive campus.” The GSC Senate meets monthly, and when the March agenda was released, no time was allotted to discuss the Confederate rally that took place during the weekend of Feb. 23 or the ASB resolution to relocate the monument, which prompted Porter to propose the resolution. This was technically the first resolution calling for the relocation of the Confederate statue on campus to be passed by any campus government organization, but all graduate students involved acknowledged the ASB resolution as the catalyst of the relocation movement.

Among the hundreds of people present for the student body Senate meeting that night in March was ASB President Elam Miller. He typically refrained from showing support for campus activism, instead wanting to represent the comprehensive student voice. This time, though, was different. “We are making history,” he said. “We live in quite a divisive time these days, and I think tonight really shows great compromise.” With a smile on his face, Miller signed the legislation directly after the vote, moving it into the hands of university administration, who wouldn’t act on the issue for another several months.
At 7:49 a.m. on March 7, 2019 — the day following ASB’s historic vote to relocate the Confederate monument — then Interim Chancellor Larry Sparks released a statement to the UM community regarding the vote. This statement broke a 13-day period of silence, as the last public comment he made was to condemn “bigotry and racism” ahead of the Confederate marches in February. During those 13 days, the university saw nearly a dozen policemen guarding a march celebrating Black History Month, hundreds of Confederate supporters flooding campus with vitriol, dozens of students shouting in counterprotest, and finally, multiple governing bodies of the university voting for change.

The first words he said to the university following nearly two weeks of disorder were:

“We appreciate the thoughtful and deliberate consideration that the student groups have given to formulating, debating, and passing their resolutions recommending relocation of the monument. This is an important decision and issue for our university. We understand that other campus constituents are considering resolutions, and once received, we will take those under consideration as well.” He then went on to explain his — and other university administrators’ — understanding of what the next steps for relocation would entail, should the university decide to move forward with them. Sparks would not make a statement in support of relocating the monument until weeks later.

While Sparks and his communications team had not yet taken a stance on the proposed relocation, student leaders, state education officials, politicians and seemingly anyone else with a vested interest in Mississippi’s flagship stepped forward to assert their opinions. The one question they were all trying to answer was: Who has the power to actually move the monument?
Mississippi law is ambiguous at times, and unsurprisingly, it does not specifically address who or what entity has the legal authority to relocate a public university’s Confederate monument. The monument also stood in the Lyceum-Circle national historic district — the infamous site of the 1962 riots against James Meredith and the university’s federally ordered desegregation — which further complicated the issue of relocation.

Mississippi Code 55-15-81, a law that state legislators passed with bi-partisan support in 2004, was the central focus of the debate. The code states that any monument honoring the “War Between the States” erected on public property cannot be “relocated, removed, disturbed, altered, renamed or rededicated.” However, in October 2017, Mississippi’s Deputy Attorney General Mike Lanford said Confederate monuments can be relocated as long as they remain on similar public property. Mississippi Code 55-15-81 also explains that “the governing body may move the memorial to a more suitable location if it is determined that the location is more appropriate to displaying the monument.” Thus, defining who or what the governing body of the university’s Confederate monument was became the most important task for the university community in the spring of 2019.

The Associated Student Body Senate, the Graduate Student Council, the Staff Council and the Faculty Senate professed in their resolutions that since they were the four campus governing groups, they were the governing body of the university. However, the state Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) Board of Trustees quickly claimed that monument relocation fell under its jurisdiction. Caron Blanton, the communications director for IHL, declared in a statement to The Daily Mississippian on March 8 that the Board of Trustees is “the governing authority for all public universities in Mississippi, including The University of Mississippi.” While the shared governance model is widely considered a basic tenet of higher education, Blanton and the IHL Board of Trustees asserted that the role of the campus government groups was to prompt
administrators to make decisions on change, not actually decide themselves.

“In a shared governance model utilized on most university campuses, the student body, represented by the Associated Student Body at The University of Mississippi, has a voice on issues impacting the campus, along with other members of the campus community, including faculty and staff,” Blanton said. “The institutional executive officer makes the determination on whether to submit an item for approval by the Board of Trustees.” Blanton’s logic contended that campus government organizations could urge the university to move the monument all they wanted, but IHL was the only group that could approve relocation. Additionally, IHL would only be able to discuss relocation if the chancellor of the university submitted it as an item on the Board of Trustees’ agenda.

Still, students, faculty and others involved were not willing to take IHL’s statements as fact. Stacey Lantagne, then vice chair of the faculty senate and assistant law professor at UM, called this assertion into question immediately. “I personally think there’s a decent argument to be made that (the governing body) is all of us,” she said. “The IHL doesn’t make that decision. The courts make that decision.”

State legislators who authored the bill that dictates how monuments can be relocated in Mississippi also came forward to proclaim their varying opinions on whose legal right it was to relocate the Confederate monument. Former state Senator Deborah Dawkins, a Democrat who was an author on the bill, said she did not believe IHL was the governing body of the university’s Confederate monument. Instead, like several of her co-authors on the bill, she defended the argument that the power to relocate campus statues in Mississippi belongs to governing groups on campus. “I think (IHL) is over policies of purchasing, certification, educational matters and things like that,” Dawkins said to a Daily Mississippian reporter. “I would think, for each campus
in the state of Mississippi, whoever the lead group on that campus is would be the ones that would be in charge of relocating a military monument.”

Contrarily, former state Senators Mike Cheney and Stacey Pickering, who were both Republican co-authors of the bill, stood on the side of IHL. “I think when it comes to our wars, whether we understand or don’t understand, I think it’s important in every aspect that we approach history and approach our fellow Mississippians cautiously and keep them in context,” Pickering said. “No matter what era.” He also applauded the university for being “very measured” in its response to the calls for monument relocation.

Ultimately, none of the clamor surrounding the rightful “governing body” of the university’s Confederate monument mattered much to the result. People across the state spoke in opposition to and in favor of IHL holding the power over the months that followed the passage of the campus resolutions. Still, the discussions dwindled, and IHL’s claim over the monument’s fate was all that remained. The process that the university pursued to relocate the monument moved forward just as Interim Chancellor Sparks said it would in his statement on March 7. “In order to relocate the monument, the university would need to submit an agenda item to the Board of Trustees of the Mississippi State Institutions of Higher Learning for consideration,” he said. “Prior to that, the university would need to develop its justification that the cemetery is a suitable location, as required by the statute, and consult with the Mississippi Department of Archives and History due to the landmark status of the monument.”

In the final days of March, Sparks made a statement to the university community affirming that he believed the monument should be moved from the heart of the Ole Miss campus to “a more suitable location.” At that point, it was already too late to submit an agenda item for the IHL Board of Trustees’ next monthly meeting, and student leaders who had supported the various campus resolutions expressed some frustration with the weeks Sparks took
before publicly supporting the relocation. “We will work diligently toward this goal by respecting and abiding by state rules, regulations and policies that govern the process of relocation, and by continuing to provide updates to the university community as the process moves forward,” Sparks’s statement read. “This is an important decision for our university. The monument, its meaning and its location have been a point of discussion and debate for many years.”

The next step toward relocation was to receive permission from the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH), and Sparks said in his statement of support that he had already submitted a “notice of intent” to gain approval for the project. Michael Morris, public information officer for the MDAH, said the university Circle was designated as a state landmark in 2011, which, under the state’s Antiquities Law, compels the university to obtain a permit from the department before altering a landmark. “If the owner of a Mississippi landmark decides to undertake a construction or improvement project that affects the landmark, the Antiquities Law requires the owner to submit a notice of intent and include a detailed description of the proposed project with photographs, plans and/or specifications,” Morris said. “Permits are approved for projects meeting the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation.”

Once the permit was received, Sparks said the university could push the issue up to IHL, but in the spring of 2019, the timeline as to when the monument would physically move was so abstract that no one on campus seemed to have a realistic understanding of how or if relocation would occur.

Black Student Union President Jarvis Benson said he saw the university administration’s backing of efforts to remove the Confederate statue from the center of campus as a demonstration of the power of student voices. “Students have worked for years to get the university to appropriately address its white supremacist past,” Benson said. “The chancellor’s
statement (...) gives hope for more intentional efforts to do so.” In the same week, 14 months before IHL would even take up the issue as an agenda item, an assistant professor of history and African-American studies Shennette Garrett-Scott tweeted that the Confederate statue relocation was a “long time coming,” and another alum tweeted, “Not entirely confident this process will be successful, but the university deserves praise for publicly trying.”

Some students thought Sparks’s support would be the end-all-be-all to making the change happen and that the remaining groups that needed to approve it would just be formalities. Others expected that bureaucratic red tape or an uncooperative IHL Board of Trustees would prevent the relocation from happening altogether and refused to show their worry or excitement. Then, just as the university’s skeptics predicted, university administrators and communications offices alike fell into a long silence.

Five months later, the MDAH still had not received proposed plans for relocation from the university, and in email correspondences with The Daily Mississippian throughout the spring and into the summer, university spokesperson Rod Guajardo continued to write that there were no new updates and that Sparks’s March 21 statement asserting his intentions to relocate would serve as the university’s comment.
A TRANSITION OF POWER

Once the university administration committed to relocating the Confederate monument, 15 months passed before the state Institutions of Higher Learning Board of Trustees took the relocation to a vote. During this time, the UM community’s attention drifted away from the monument, and in October of 2019, all eyes were on the inner workings of the university administration and IHL itself.

Larry Sparks had served as interim chancellor since the start of 2019, and while students spent the spring semester urging the university and IHL to move the monument, IHL was searching for the 18th chancellor of the university. On Oct. 3, without completing the traditional 20-step process, the Board of Trustees announced that it would be Glenn Boyce, the former IHL commissioner who had consulted on the search from its early stages, who would take over the top position at UM. In a conference call following his selection, Boyce estimated he was paid around $87,000 for his consultation services. “Once I completed my work, which was completed before the search even started,” Boyce said. “I was finished. I didn’t do any more work during the time that the search was conducted.” Boyce never formally applied for the job, and he did not visit UM’s Oxford campus or The University of Mississippi Medical Center prior to his appointment.

Students, faculty and staff alike were outraged by the appointment, widely viewing it as a signal of corruption among the board that has the final say in most decisions concerning all eight public universities in Mississippi. The IHL Board of Trustees is composed of 12 trustees: seven white men, three Black men and two white women, all of whom were nominated by former Gov. Phil Bryant. Upon Boyce’s appointment without widespread approval from the UM community,
people began questioning IHL’s role in Mississippi higher education as a whole. “The board supposedly represents democratic values. That is a farce.” wrote the editorial board of The Daily Mississippian in a rare staff editorial under the headline “Bullshit.” “When a small group of individuals — appointed by a single governor — chooses for a large community of people, it is nothing other than undemocratic.”

The rest of campus broke into protests against both the chancellor search process and Boyce himself. Some members of the Chancellor Search Committee even disapproved, including English professor Aimee Nezhukumatathil. On her personal Twitter account, she published a portion of the paperwork she had to sign in order to be a part of the committee that said all members must not have a personal or professional relationship with any candidate and must act in a fair and unbiased manner. “We ALL signed this,” Nezhukumatathil wrote. “I was stupid enough to believe we'd all be held accountable to this.”

Calls to abolish IHL and fire Boyce persisted throughout the UM community, as well as more moderate pushes for public universities in the state to rethink the power that IHL maintains. Even ASB president Barron Mayfield, who served as the sole undergraduate student representative on the Chancellor Search Advisory Committee, said he did not think the IHL took student input or the input of the advisory committee into account when they made their decision. When a Daily Mississippian reporter asked Mayfield what a better chancellor search process would look like in the future, he leaned in close to the recorder and said, “one not run by the IHL.” The community saw Boyce as a symbol of the institution, and to many, his appointment made it all too obvious that IHL was the entity in control of The University of Mississippi. Without explicitly saying it this time, IHL once again asserted that it was the governing body at the university.
While the UM community directed its advocacy and anger toward Chancellor Boyce, the movement to relocate the Confederate monument faded into background discussions and occasional mentions in the student newspaper. Still, the Mississippi State Department of Archives and History continued the process that interim Chancellor Larry Sparks set in motion earlier that year when he submitted a letter of intent to relocate the monument to the MDAH in March. At the beginning of the fall 2019 semester — before Boyce came to campus — Sparks notified the community via email that he had completed additional steps toward relocation over the summer, despite maintaining public silence.

On April 2, he had completed a review meeting with the state Department of Archives and History. On June 3, the university had contracted with a consulting firm to develop relocation plans, which was completed by August 27, and on that same day in late August, the university finally submitted the plans for MDAH approval. “We are following the steps necessary for successful relocation and will maintain steady and committed progress to accomplish this relocation. I reiterate that this will place the monument in a more suitable location, one that is commensurate with the purpose that is etched on its side,” Sparks said at the time.

As Boyce took on the role of chancellor and began trying to mend his precarious relationship with the university community, he did not speak on the monument or its relocation. He was finally forced to do so on Dec. 6 as the Archives and History board unanimously approved the university plans for relocation. “We appreciate the work to develop the required documentation for this submission and ensure that the plan abides by state rules, regulations and policies governing construction projects on our campus. We also appreciate MDAH for its review and approval of our proposed plan,” Boyce said in a university-wide email. “MDAH approval was required before the request could be submitted to IHL. With MDAH approval in
hand, we will move forward.” At this time, Boyce did not speak to whether he personally supported the relocation.

IHL trustee members were quick to remind Mississippians that the relocation was not yet in their control. Just over an hour after Boyce’s statement, IHL released a statement of its own saying it had not received a request from the chancellor. “To date, the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning has not been presented with a request from the Chancellor to relocate the Confederate monument located on The University of Mississippi campus,” the statement said. “The Chancellor of the university determines the items concerning UM that will be submitted to the Board for consideration.” The IHL would not hold its next board meeting until January 16, 2020. Thus, the university community once again played the waiting game, but this time, an end date was set.

Sometime following Boyce’s December statement, he did just as he had promised and submitted an agenda item to the IHL Board of Trustees seeking relocation. The board was officially set to take its vote on the third Thursday of 2020, and when the meeting began, only the board members themselves were prepared for what was to take place. Defying expectations, IHL neither approved nor denied the request, opting to table the vote until further notice.

IHL Trustee Tom Duff, who made the motion to table the vote, said he wanted more information from the university on the progress made toward implementing recommendations from the 2017 contextualization report from the Chancellor’s Advisory Committee on History and Context (CACHC). Specifically, the committee recommended “the placement of headstones for the Confederate dead in the university’s cemetery to recognize their sacrifice, and the placement of an appropriate marker to recognize the men from Lafayette County who served in the United States Colored Troops during the Civil War.” The proposals related to Duff’s request
made up one page of the 49-page report and would later become the most contentious aspect of the entire relocation.

In this same meeting, Duff and the other board members voted to name the new STEM building on campus the Jim and Thomas Duff Center for Science and Technology Innovation after Duff and his brother donated $26 million to the university. “There is no relationship at all between the STEM building gift and the decision to pull the relocation of the monument from the IHL agenda at its January meeting,” university spokesperson Rod Guajardo said. “Discussions about the gift were underway for several months prior to that meeting. These items simply happened to be discussed at the same IHL meeting.” Even so, some students and alumni like former ASB senator Jarvis Benson said the donation made them think considerably about the apparent relationship between Duff and university administration.

After Duff asked for the additions to UM’s report, members of the chancellor’s advisory committee were confused as to what more he wanted. Associate professor of history and former member of the CACHC Anne Twitty said that because the number and names of soldiers buried in the university cemetery was so poorly documented throughout history, the logistics of placing headstones are complicated. “Obviously, you can’t place a marker that just says ‘here is a grave,’” Twitty said to a Daily Mississippian reporter. She added that the university never made a formal commitment to implementing her committee’s suggestions, so she found it curious that Duff would request that information. Nonetheless, IHL Commissioner Al Rankins released a statement later that day reiterating that the board would take up the relocation item after the university provided them with a report on those proposals for contextualizing the cemetery. Chancellor Boyce would have to resubmit the proposal and agenda item to the board after making the requested edits.
Once again without addressing the issue any more than immediately necessary, Boyce released a statement via university-wide email to inform those who didn’t already know that his former colleagues — the IHL Board of Trustees — had tabled its vote and requested additional reports. “We will provide this report to the board members and work with them to address any concerns that they have. Our governing body – the IHL board – has exclusive authority to relocate the statue,” Boyce’s email read. “Our university leadership will keep you informed and provide further updates as this process continues.”

While the UM community originally anticipated a decision by the end of that January meeting, surprise quickly dissipated in the following days. “The entire process has been postponed for several decades, and so I think one more delay is not radically outside of what they’ve done in the past,” UM graduate Jarvis Benson said to a Daily Mississippian reporter. Benson was also one of the eight students who introduced the ASB resolution to relocate the monument. “I don’t think they’re owed any more information from the university or any of the other stakeholders in this process,” he said. “Right now, they realize it’s all in their hands, and the best decision for them is no decision.”

ASB President Mayfield said that after the January meeting, he and other student leaders went into “information gathering mode,” meeting with university leadership and figuring out what they could do to help. “This fight is not over. I plan to work with other student leaders and administrators to ensure that the proposal is quickly added back onto the IHL’s next meeting agenda,” he said. Mayfield was confident that it would be completed during the spring semester, but like many other hopeful students, he was wrong.
On a gloomy February afternoon, rain began to fall on Oxford as dozens of Black students started to march toward the Confederate monument from Lamar Hall carrying signs scrawled with phrases like “I am my ancestors’ wildest dream,” “We will not be silenced,” and “Take the statue down.” Arielle Hudson, then president of the Black Student Union, led the pack, marching to commemorate Black History Month and to remind the university that minorities are as much a part of the UM community as any other student demographic. “People need to know that we value this place just as much as anyone else values this place,” said Kaylan Gilliam, a participant in the march and president of E.S.T.E.E.M., a Black student organization for female minorities. “We belong here just as much as anyone else does, and (we’re trying to change) the narrative of Ole Miss itself as we’re trying to change the culture.” Gilliam said the first step in changing the culture would be changing the symbols that the Ole Miss culture finds value in, including the Confederate monument.

The organizers registered the march with the university weeks in advance, and when they did so, they requested that the university place a podium behind the Confederate monument in the Circle for Hudson and other students leaders to speak. However, when the march reached the Circle, the podium had been placed in front of the Lyceum instead. Rather than accept the backdrop of the university’s white columns, Hudson lifted the podium and strode directly to the Confederate monument. “They placed it in front of the Lyceum, but we decided that we wanted it where we said we wanted it, so we just picked it up and moved it,” Hudson said.

She did not want to speculate on whether the placement of the podium in front of the Lyceum was intentional, but it was not unheard of for the university to avoid its central symbol
of the Confederacy. Ole Miss Ambassadors, including Hudson herself, were instructed to avoid the monument on tours with prospective students whenever possible to avoid misrepresenting university values. “Those conversations were hard, especially as a Black student trying to convince other Black students and their families that they belong here,” Hudson told the AP. “You’re standing a few feet away from an object that tells them that space wasn’t made for them.”

That February, after many UM community members had voiced support for relocating the monument and denounced it as a shameful relic of the university’s past, it still stood in the most visible spot on campus, and the university continued trying to tiptoe around its implications. All the while, shame was building, not only because the monument had yet to be moved, but because many alumni, students, faculty and staff became worried about what it would mean for the university and state as a whole if the relocation weren’t approved.

In her 1997 novel *The Band Played Dixie: Race and the Liberal Conscience at Ole Miss*, Nadine Cohodas portrayed the flagship university as a barometer for progress in racial relations. Since the Civil Rights era, Mississippi seemed to be the last state, the last community to ever make significant progress in race relations. Thus, when Mississippi considers making a change like relocating Confederate monuments from a center thoroughfare to the edge of campus, that action has potential to mean something to the entirety of the United States. It means the country is either progressing or it is stuck. Righting the wrongs of the past and correcting a negative reputation has been an ongoing process for the university in which the relocating the Confederate monument had potential to play a significant role.

Throughout the extended period of uncertainty prior to the eventual IHL vote, several members of the UM community wrote guest columns, letters to the editor or opinion articles to *The Daily Mississippian* expressing this sentiment of urgency and significance. One unpublished
letter came from then senior political science major Ryan Oehrli. “We cannot continue to watch crises emerge every few years, followed by shame, and shake our heads in disbelief until the cycle repeats itself,” he wrote. “The statue and other Confederate iconography are symbols of hate. Naturally, they draw hatred. There is plenty to love about Oxford; the statue does not represent those things. It’s essential that it be moved.”

When February turned to March and no word on an updated report for IHL was released, students and faculty who were invested in the relocation movement became uneasy again. Boyce was just approaching a point where people were no longer willing to wait patiently for him to resubmit the IHL report on his own, and talks of additional advocacy efforts started to ramp up for a second time. Then, the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Any momentum that the relocation had and any pressure to move swiftly that the administration was beginning to feel turned to nothing over the course of a single week. The priority of the UM community shifted from making racial progress on campus to making sure it could survive an impending pandemic.
THE PERFECT STORM

The panic resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic directed student attention away from the monument as they were forced to leave the university campus, but in their time in quarantine something changed. On May 25, 2020, Minneapolis police officers arrested George Floyd for using counterfeit money, and within 17 minutes, they had him pinned to the ground dying. Floyd’s brutal murder at the hands of police officers led millions of Americans to reexamine the way they view race relations and to examine what inequalities they passively consentented to on a regular basis. As fierce protests erupted across the country, the Black Lives Matter movement saw a resurgence in popularity since its inception in 2013.

Apart from the approximate 21 million Americans who participated in protests themselves, corporate America also felt compelled to respond. Quaker Oats removed its Aunt Jemima brand from shelves, Adidas committed to filling 30% of new positions with Black or Latinx workers and so many other companies responded to the movement as well. A survey from the independent non-profit JUST Capital found that the large majority of Americans either somewhat favored or strongly favored CEOs responding to the protests with a statement about ending police violence (84%), promoting peaceful protest (84%), elevating diversity and inclusion in the workplace (78%), condemning racial inequity (75%), and condemning police killings of unarmed Black people (73%).

Furthermore, many public and private university administrators felt urged to take official, public stances against racism. The university community and Chancellor Glenn Boyce were no different. The cultural circumstances pushed Boyce to make an anti-racism statement and declare his personal support for Confederate monument relocation in a way he had avoided before. “The
tragic deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor have evoked much anger, horror and disbelief. The confluence of events in recent weeks continue to tear apart the fabric of our country and impact our campus,” Boyce wrote. “This is a time for change. For me, that means moving the monument away from the center of our campus. That monument has divided this campus, and the process of its removal from the Circle is one I am committed to seeing through to completion. There is more to do, but this needs to happen.”

Had Boyce made this statement at any earlier point in the timeline of relocation, the UM community likely would have been astounded by his willingness to throw full support behind a “political” issue that actively sits in the arena of public debate. Now, though, much of the community expected nothing less. May of 2020 did not look kindly on tepid statements or actions, and if leaders in higher education, business or politics were staying silent, they might as well have been publicly supporting minority oppression. In other cities across the country where Confederate monuments still stood, university administrators, city governments, and in some cases, protesters began taking action to remove or relocate during this time. From the time of Floyd’s death to August, 59 Confederate symbols had been removed or replaced, according to a report from the Southern Poverty Law Center, and the most shocking aspect of this was that the processes for many of these removals had started during that same time period.

For example, only two weeks after the minor student push to do so began, The University of Alabama Board of Trustees authorized the removal of three plaques commemorating the students who served in the Confederate army. At the same time, the president created a task force to assess the names of all buildings on campus and recommend potential changes. The ease with which this similar, public state institution in the Deep South could accomplish something that The University of Mississippi had been working to do for over a year was embarrassing to many of the students and faculty involved in the movement. Driven by a combination of desire for
progress, cultural pressures from the BLM protests and an increased amount of free time in the pandemic, students renewed the push to relocate the monument as soon as possible.

The first domino to fall in the final series of events before IHL would take its vote was when Greek organizations took a relatively unified stand for monument relocation. On June 4, Delta Psi president Drew Leopard posted a statement on social media calling for IHL to vote in its next meeting on June 18. Leopard’s statement called for all executive boards and all chapter presidents of the College Panhellenic (CPH), National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) and Interfraternity Council (IFC) to sign, affirming their support for relocating the monument to the Confederate cemetery on campus. “What happened to George Floyd and what’s happening right now with the protests shows that racism is still very prevalent in our country, and having a statue that stands for that in the middle of our campus is just not right,” Leopard said. “I am calling on my peers to be the leaders that they are in the Greek community.”

Joshua Mannery, ASB president, said he loved the statement and is proud of the Greek community for getting behind the movement to relocate the monument, even if it is long overdue. “I appreciate how firm of a stance they are taking now because they have to make up for the fact that they weren’t there a year ago. I don’t hold it against them because they’re with us now,” Mannery said. “We have to acknowledge the efforts that ASB, BSU and other organizations have been making, but we can still provide the opportunity for other organizations to join the fight, too.” In terms of why the sorority and fraternity councils waited to make a statement, IFC president Cole Barnhill, CPH president Shelby D’Amico and NPHC president Candace Bolden said they could not speak on the actions that their predecessors chose to take or not to take. “All I can say is different leadership, different time,” Barnhill said. “We’re trying to acknowledge maybe some lacking on our part in previous years, and saying this is who we are today and this is who we are moving forward.”
Bolden said NPHC had been involved in the conversation about monument relocation before the ASB Senate vote last March, but she said uniting with CPH and IFC for this statement gives all three councils “a more unified front” as the Greek community on campus. “Being a black woman has been a part of my identity since before birth, so stuff that I’m struggling with now that you see in the media is stuff that I’ve struggled with on campus,” she said. “I am very thankful, as a black woman in our community here at The University of Mississippi — and as a member of the BSU, and as a member of NPHC and as a member of E.S.T.E.E.M. — that we have support from our Greek brothers and sisters of different councils.” The final letter asked the IHL board that the vote to relocate “be handled swiftly,” and it was signed by all but one of the council members and chapter presidents of IFC, CPH and NPHC.

The next wave of support came from the six largest student organizations at the university and the over 6,700 signatures they amassed on a #UMoveTheStatue petition. The student leaders of the ASB, Black Student Union (BSU), Student Activities Association (SAA), RebelTHON, The Ole Miss Big Event and Leadership and Engagement Ambassadors created the petition calling for IHL to finally approve the university’s request to move the statue from the Circle to the Confederate cemetery in their meeting on Thursday, June 18. “I don’t know if anything has changed within IHL between their last meeting and this one, but a lot has changed in our nation,” SAA executive director Trevor Davis said. “Now, they can take the time to realize that other universities are doing this, and we can do the same thing.” The organizations started the campaign on social media ten days before the IHL meeting at the suggestion of Davis and ASB vice president Abby Johnston to educate the community about the statue and why they wanted it relocated.

While student organizations like the BSU and ASB are heavily involved with political issues and activism at the university, this was the first time that organizations like RebelTHON,
The Big Event and SAA have taken a public stance on an issue affecting the community. RebelTHON director of administration Caleb Bloodworth and Big Event co-director Cade Slaughter, wanted the statue relocated simply because they were tired of avoiding it. Both students previously served as orientation leaders, where they were instructed to circumvent the statue when walking their groups of incoming freshmen around campus. “That’s just ridiculous to me that I can’t walk through the center of our campus because there’s something there that we can’t talk about,” Slaughter said. “It only makes sense that we relocate the statue now, not later.”

Mister Clemmones, the head ambassador of the Leadership and Engagement Ambassadors, said he sees the statue not only as a symbol of hate, but as a magnet for it. “Look at the Confederate groups who came to campus last spring just to support the statue,” he said. “It made students of color like me feel bad about themselves for choosing to come to this university.” Prior to enrolling at the university, Clemmones said he had to convince his family and friends that The University of Mississippi was a safe place for minorities, despite the university’s history of racism and violence. “In the past, we’ve changed mascots and taken down the flag. This can just be another victory that we’ll point to and say, ‘Hey, our university is straying away from those ideals, so that’s why I’ll be safe at this university,’” Clemmons said.

All 11 student leaders who started the #UMoveTheStatue campaign conclusively agreed that “the statue endorses racist values and puts them on a pedestal at the front door of our campus, as if it is insight to the collective creed of our community.” Their joint statement asserted that because these values are not representative of the university, the statue should be removed from the Circle. Ultimately, with thousands of students and every major campus constituency calling for the vote, Boyce and IHL almost had no choice but to bring the issue of monument relocation to a final decision. On June 9, Boyce sent the updated proposal — Confederate cemetery renovation plans and all — to the IHL Board of Trustees. The board added
the item to its June agenda, and by Monday, June 18, Mississippi Today reported that sources close to IHL said the relocation was expected to pass.

While many supporters of the relocation did not want to jinx the vote by celebrating before the approval was final, those who wanted the monument to remain in place drifted toward campus to pay homage to the monument in its central location one more time during the last two days before the IHL meeting. Then, on the day of the vote, some students travelled to Jackson to witness the meeting in person. Others sat at picnic tables in the Grove, staring back and forth between phones and the monument itself as if it could disappear as soon as the vote went through.

Just like that, on the morning of June 18, it seemed to be done. After years of advocacy, several protests, at least four pieces of student and faculty legislation and thousands of signatures, the IHL Board of Trustees voted unanimously and without discussion to relocate The University of Mississippi’s Confederate monument.

“It only took three plus years, endless hours of student activism and a lot of tough conversations, but we’re finally here,” ASB President Joshua Mannery wrote on social media that day. “Now, we look to the future. It’s time to uphold the values and expectations that come with being the flagship university of the state of Mississippi.” The university community let out a collective sigh, finding reprieve for a brief moment.
Not even a full day had passed before the UM community erupted in outrage once again. Joy dissolved and the feeling of success that monument relocation advocates so badly wanted to hold onto faded into a sentiment of disbelief. Boyce submitted his relocation proposal to IHL on June 9, but the document in its entirety was not made available to the public until the night of June 17 — hours before the IHL Board of Trustees was to vote on it.

Included on the last page of the 156-page proposal that Chancellor Glenn Boyce sent to IHL were two renderings of the renovated Confederate cemetery with the relocated monument. The first image showed extravagant landscaping to match that in the Grove, a newly laid brick path in the cemetery, lights installed at the foot of the monument, hundreds of headstones placed inside the reconstructed walls of the cemetery and a new marker “to recognize the men from Lafayette County who served in the Union Army as part of the United States Colored Troops during the Civil War.” The second image depicted the scene from an aerial view, and both included mockups of people observing the monument and the original cemetery marker for those who died in the battle of Shiloh in 1862.

By noon on the day after the proposal passed, several local journalists and prominent professors had discovered the images and began circulating them on social media. As most shocking information does in Mississippi, the images spread quickly, and so did a community-wide sentiment of betrayal. University administrators had publicly stated their support of monument relocation in the past year, but the community saw the renderings as proof of deceit. “So, instead of solely relocating the statue to the cemetery, they loopholed their way by relocating it to the ‘cemetery,’ except they transformed the cemetery into a mini version of a
Confederate Central Park with the statue as the main attraction,” BSU member Deterrian Jones wrote on Twitter. “This is disgusting.”

Some students publicly threatened to transfer away from The University of Mississippi unless the relocation and cemetery renovation plans were changed, and dozens of alumni tweeted that they would no longer support the university financially or otherwise if the renovation were to be carried out. Meanwhile, others called the plan “a shrine to white supremacy” and a deviation from the relocation movement’s intentions. “While everyone else is tearing shit down, Ole Miss is building a million dollar shrine to the confederacy, thus completely missing the point of why we wanted the stupid statue removed in the first place. I hate it,” wrote one community member on Twitter.

At this time, the only university comment available was from UM spokesman and media relations director Rod Guajardo. He told Mississippi Today that the plans had “continued to evolve” since the renderings had been completed. “These renderings were used as supporting documentation in the university’s submission and in conversations between Chancellor (Glenn) Boyce and the (IHL board) to offer visuals of what the site could look like in accordance with state law, which allows a monument to be moved ‘to a more suitable location if it is determined that the location is more appropriate to displaying the monument,’” Guajardo said. Boyce himself did not make a statement on the matter until the following week.

Whether there was truth to it or not, many students felt as though the university administration had intentionally deceived them, convinced them that UM was on their side with the relocation only to create a new rallying point for Confederate supporters on campus. “This is beyond disgusting and such a slap in the face to all the Black students who go here. How can you receive money from Black students, profit off of Black athletes and still think this is okay? Ole Miss, y’all are spineless,” wrote another UM community member on Twitter.
Around this time, Ole Miss athletes were also advocating for the relocation of the other Confederate monument in Oxford, which stands in front of the courthouse on The Square. After a Black Lives Matter rally, Rebel linebacker MoMo Sonogo told Clarion Ledger reporter Nick Suss about the negative impact he sees Confederate iconography having on the university community. "If you take away that flag from Mississippi and you take away the statues from our university and from The Square and you look at Mississippi and at Oxford," Sanogo said, "it is such a welcoming place that you want to bring your whole family and friends and everyone. When you put those there, it blocks off a huge portion of that."

This resentment toward the university would persist among a dedicated crowd of relocation advocates for more than a month, and even as the anger faded, the underlying distrust in the university administration would remain.

The anger percolated through social media over the weekend, and on Monday, June 22, Boyce sent a university-wide email to acknowledge the errors he had made in the approval process. “In the effort to expedite the resubmission of our proposal in order to get the monument relocated before the Fall 2020 semester begins, I did not take the time to share with our community our progress in moving the project forward,” Boyce wrote. “This is a historic accomplishment for our campus, and I am saddened that my decision to move forward with the artist’s renderings is jeopardizing the excitement we have over the monument being relocated.”

In regards to the renderings, Boyce noted that they represented plans that had been publicly available since August 2019, and he proceeded to link to a document from August 2019 in which the renderings were not included. Additionally, he wrote that many of the aspects present in the renderings would not be implemented in the renovation, including the bench, the brick path, the cemetery wall renovations, elaborate landscaping or excessive lighting. However, Boyce remained adamant that the addition of cemetery headstones would move forward and
announced that he had “reconvened the Work Group for the Cemetery Headstone Project.”

Boyce also reconvened the Work Group for the Troops Memorial to develop a plan for the memorial for “the U.S. Black Troops from Lafayette County that fought for the Union Army.”

When the Chancellor’s Advisory Committee on History and Context (CACHC) originally established these two work groups in 2018, Dr. John Neff, a renowned associate professor of history at the university, was to chair both. Neff died at the age of 58 in January 2020, and he left the cemetery renovation planning to his vice chair, John W. “Don” Barrett, who had been a strong advocate for the preservation and renovation of battlefields, libraries and cemeteries dedicated to the Civil War throughout his life. Barrett was also a powerful trial attorney in the state, a UM alum and a voting member of the Board of Directors for The University of Mississippi Foundation. When the original members of the CACHC later sent a statement to The Daily Mississippian to clarify that they did not support the plans for cemetery renovation, Barrett was one of four living members who did not sign it. Eight original members of the CACHC signed the statement.

Barrett never gave an official comment about his involvement in the plans, other than leading the two work groups, but many students, professors and alumni assumed that he was likely one of the private donors supporting the $1.15 million project. Barrett also had connections to the Sons of Confederate Veterans group and the Jefferson Davis Foundation, also known as the Beauvoir Foundation. Because of Barrett’s ties to those groups, many UM community members began to question why he was allowed to head multiple renovation projects within the cemetery. “This is as much an indictment of Boyce as it is of Don Barrett,” sociology professor James Thomas said in a tweet after the Mississippi Free Press published a report on Barrett’s past.
As June came to an end, students and community members shook off their exhaustion and traded it for action. Boyce nixing a bench and flowers from the relocation plan was not enough to appease the community. Those who advocated for relocation wanted all frills cut — including Barrett’s Union soldier memorial and headstone projects.

While protests had occurred earlier in the year surrounding racial equity and equality at the university, none had been directed solely at the subject of the monument. When another month passed without relocation, a group of UM community members decided to change that. Gone were the days of passing resolutions and sending Boyce strongly worded emails. It was 2020 — the summer of change — and the students at The University of Mississippi were ready to fight for their justice.
NO PEACE

By the final day of June, students, alumni and faculty had organized. At 1 p.m. that afternoon, dozens of community members gathered behind the Manning Athletics Performance Center with masks, posters and a determination to halt the proposed Confederate cemetery renovation. “We have been notified that the University Police Department is here. We will see them over there, and as we make our way to the cemetery, keep in mind that they are not supposed to impede our rights,” alumni and co-author of the original relocation resolution Leah Davis said. “If they do ask us to leave, the action we will be taking is to get on our knees and put our hands up.”

In peak Mississippi heat, the crowd marched down Manning Way, chanting mantras like “Relocation, not glorification” and “Abandon the plan.” As they walked by, several student athletes stood outside of the Manning Center to raise their fists in solidarity, and once the group began approaching the site, one Black construction crew member did the same from a construction lift behind the walls of the cemetery. It remains unclear whether the man knew that the march was against existing relocation plans, but there is a good chance that he did. If that’s the case, his fist raised in the air demonstrated that there was dissent even among those employed to move the monument and renovate the cemetery.

At this point in time, the university had already erected a 10-foot-tall chain link fence around the cemetery and installed a green privacy screen surrounding the area as well. The only people allowed inside were crew members, university officials and security guards. Still, the protesters wanted in. As they marched up to the police line on Coliseum Loop that blocked off the entrance to the cemetery, senior public policy major Tyler Yarbrough, alumna Brianna Simms
and several others attempted to walk past it, stating their “right to protest.” University police officers and Wood Security guards promptly stopped them, and other protesters tore down the police tape.

Tension grew and chants crescendoed as security guards physically moved Yarbrough and Simms back across the police line. “At one point, we asked, ‘Do we want to keep walking?’ and Arielle (Hudson) mentioned the officers might pull out a taser or something, so we didn’t want to endanger anybody,” Associated Student Body president Joshua Mannery said. At the signal of Mannery and others, silence immediately fell over the group. The crowd dropped to a kneel, some with their hands up, and entered into a moment of silence to honor those who have died at the hands of police brutality. The group stayed down for 8 minutes and 46 seconds — roughly the amount of time that Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on George Floyd’s neck on May 25, which resulted in his death. The three security guards and eight police officers present at the Confederate cemetery, including Chief Ray Hawkins, stood by quietly.

When the protesters rose to their feet, chants of “What’s outrageous? Racist values. What’s disgusting? Racist statues” began. “We are here today because in a time where people across our country are screaming Black Lives Matter, Chancellor (Glenn) Boyce has shown us that he doesn’t give a damn about our voice,” Yarbrough said. “By proposing to build a million-dollar shrine to white supremacy in this very spot, Chancellor Boyce has blatantly disregarded the lives of Black students, Black faculty, Black staff and Black alumni.”

Other protest organizers also spoke to the crowd about the lack of transparency the university had shown them and the complete distrust they had in university administrators. The overall sentiment that these students and alumni expressed was the feeling that The University of Mississippi did not value their opinions or their presence on campus. “You have signalled to Black students over and over and over again that our voices do not matter. What is it about the
student voice that scares you so much?” Davis said. “We will fight these systems. I know you thought that because me and Arielle graduated, there wouldn’t be no more trouble, but guess what? There will continue to be trouble.”

Because of their leadership positions, former Black Student Union president Arielle Hudson and student body president Mannery had the cell phone numbers of the top two university administrators: Chancellor Boyce and Provost Noel Wilkin. In another effort to make their voices heard, Hudson and Mannery stood in front of the crowd and called them multiple times each. Neither Boyce nor Wilkin picked up the phone. “Trust me, they know that we’re here. They know,” Davis said. “If we have to come back here next week, we’re going to keep coming back next week.”

An hour and a half passed before the protesters turned on their heels to march back to the Manning Center, sweaty, exhausted and still feeling unheard by UM leadership. “It went as expected,” Mannery said. “The ball is in the university’s court. They can choose to abandon the plans. We don’t have to have any IHL decision.”

Mannery was correct. In the plan that Boyce submitted to the state Institutions of Higher Learning Board of Trustees, it was stated that the university maintained the right to cancel the relocation at any time. Under the Project Manual and Specifications section of the proposal, terms of the contract between the university and the contractor were outlined: the university “may, without cause or fault of either the contractor or the (university), terminate the contract in whole or in part if the (university), in its sole discretion, determined it to be in the (university’s) best interest.” The protesters who gathered on campus and those who objected to the “glorification” of the Confederate cemetery on social media believed that terminating the project would be in the best interest of the university. Now, they were working to convince administrators that this was true. Mannery hoped that the march would be sufficient, but he said
if Boyce did not respond to their calls for changing the relocation plan by the end of the week, the protests would continue.

In line with his past behavior, Boyce met them with silence. He did not respond to Mannery, Davis, Hudson, Yarbrough or any of the other protesters who were desperately trying to reach him. Instead, the campus-wide emails he sent that week focused on plans for the fall semester, and to many, it seemed as though the university was ignoring the persisting dissent around the headstone and Union memorial marker projects.

Boyce’s next public statement wouldn’t come until after the monument moved on July 14 when he said the relocation was “a meaningful change” for the UM community. Boyce was right. The relocation of the Confederate monument that stood at the heart of Mississippi’s flagship university for 114 years was historic, and though university statements called it such, the administration didn’t seem to treat the monument moving like anything more than a construction project. No crowd stood by to watch as the soldier lifted from his 29-foot-high perch in the early hours of that morning. No one cheered, and no one protested. But one university police officer sat silently observing from his parked patrol car, and at least one university employee stood by.

The university never released a planned date for the relocation, though officials continuously indicated that it would happen “as soon as possible” after receiving IHL approval on June 18. Only two known photographers were present to document the monument’s deconstruction: local freelancer Bruce Newman and university communications intern Christian Johnson. It is uncertain how Newman knew to arrive on campus that morning, but news outlets across the state published his photos as proof that the Confederate soldier would no longer stand above the university’s center. Moreover, when UM published Boyce’s statement on the relocation later that day, photos were not included or publicized.
Despite the potential cemetery renovations that still loomed above it all, The University of Mississippi came together to celebrate a victory: the Confederate soldier was gone from one of the most prominent spots on campus.

That afternoon, Boyce thanked “the students, faculty, staff and administration, as well as alumni and university foundation boards, who provided valuable input and support for the relocation effort,” in a university-wide email. He also wrote that the university had revisited aspects of the relocation and renovation since his last June 22 update, including a vague statement about cemetery excavation. Some members of the university community and news outlets, including The Oxford Eagle, interpreted this statement to mean that the previously proposed headstones would no longer be installed in the cemetery. They were ultimately correct, but no one was certain at the time. The proposed creation of a marker memorializing Black Union soldiers had not been addressed either.

With all of the back and forth, support and contempt for the plan, the UM community once again felt like it was in the dark after Boyce’s statement on July 14. People did not know what to expect when the fences around the cemetery came down, and many saw the confusion as a direct result of Boyce’s lack of transparency.

This uncertainty only stoked more frustration, and on July 16, the nine largest Black student organizations joined the groups across campus who were begging for Boyce’s attention and compliance. They released a joint statement through The Daily Mississippian denouncing any further upgrades to the Confederate cemetery and demanding a meeting with Chancellor Boyce on Monday, July 20 to clarify the university plans for the cemetery and Boyce’s personal plans to rectify his relationship with Black students.

The statement’s authors were presidents of the Black Student Union, The University of Mississippi Black Caucus, the university’s chapter of the National Association for the
Advancement of Colored People, Men of Excellence, E.S.T.E.E.M, the National Pan-Hellenic Council, The University of Mississippi Gospel Choir, I.M.A.G.E and the Minority Association for Pre-Medical Students.

“We cannot sit idly by while people like you continue to devalue our lives and presence here on this campus. As Black student leaders, we feel obligated to speak out on behalf of the organizations that we represent,” the statement read. “The details of your leaked relocation plan plainly demonstrate that you do not care at all about the lives of our African-American community on this campus.”

The next day, Boyce agreed to a meeting. He also sent another campus-wide email confirming that the university would not add headstones to the cemetery, and the only renovations that the university would move forward with were the addition of a sidewalk to make the site compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, safety lighting on the sidewalk and minimal landscaping.

Moreover, for the second time in a month, Boyce recognized his own mishandling of the relocation. “I must acknowledge that some aspects of the execution of this project have not been handled as well as I would have liked. I take seriously the concerns expressed by various student and faculty groups pertaining to certain elements of the project, and I have met over the last two weeks with faculty members, elected leaders of undergraduate and graduate student groups and the leadership of the Faculty Senate to discuss those concerns directly,” he wrote. “I take responsibility and apologize for the concerns that resulted.”

Many students appreciated Boyce’s statement, but it would take much more than an email to make up for the murky process that led to his selection as chancellor and his various self-proclaimed mistakes in the relocation process. The first step he took from there was to meet with nine of UM’s most prominent Black student leaders on July 20. Nicholas Crasta, Amirah
Lockhart, Jailien Grant, DeArrius Rhymes, Re’Kia Fairley, Candace Bolden, Asia Eichelberger, Chinwe Udemgba and Zuri Dixon Omere originally intended for the meeting to center around advocating against cemetery renovations. With the headstone and memorial projects officially abolished, though, the group turned its attention to the future of minority representation and administrational transparency at the university.

“We, as Black students, represent 13% of the university, and that aligns with the population of the United States, but Mississippi is 37% Black,” Rhymes, the president of Men of Excellence, said. “At the beginning and end of the day, we want to recruit and retain more Black students, so letting go of Confederate symbols, taking Lamar’s name off of Lamar Hall or Vardaman’s name off of Vardaman Hall and publicizing the good stuff we do at our university is what’s going to help with that.”

Rhymes’s data was correct. 2,806 Black students were enrolled at the university in the fall of 2020, which is 12.9% of the university population, and according to the 2019 U.S. Census, 37.8% of Mississippi’s population is Black. The campus statistics align more with the nation’s demographics than with Mississippi’s; approximately 13.4% of the U.S. population tracked in the 2019 census was Black. Over the past decade, though, the percentage of Black students on campus at UM has decreased, even as the total number of enrolled Black students has risen. For example, in the fall of 2009, 2,396 Black students were enrolled at the university, but they made up 15% of the student body. Rhymes and the other Black student leaders who met with Boyce recognized that since UM recruits students from all over the world — not just from Mississippi — the demographic comparisons between the state and the campus cannot be direct. As of fall 2020, about 40% of UM students come from outside of Mississippi. Still, they are pushing for more representation for minority students with the ultimate goal of increasing Black recruitment and retention at UM.
“Honestly, we can pitch a lot of ideas, but it all comes to what is said around the Ole Miss name and our media perception,” BSU president Nicholas Crasta said. “We all told (Boyce) frankly that we have to stay out of the media in negative ways. We have to be promoted for positive things and not have any controversy for Black recruitment and retention to increase.”

The group’s requests to Boyce included more minority representation on every university committee, the construction of a multicultural building on campus and targeted efforts to increase Black student recruitment and retention at the university. Crasta said Boyce seemed receptive to these goals, but no public action would be taken to achieve them for months. “The biggest thing is holding him accountable,” Crasta said. “It’s easy to make empty promises, so we’re just going to stay on him to follow through with the things he promises us.”

They did hold the university accountable. Every month following that July, the chancellor met with the same group of nine Black student organization leaders, in addition to meetings with student government, to address concerns. By January 2021, the university had committed to a five-year diversity plan that asserted several lofty goals, including recognizing UM’s racial history, creating programs to support underrepresented students and increasing scholarships for women and women of color. While much of the Pathways to Equity plan is filled with aspirations, possibilities and expectations, many Black student leaders on campus said they believed the university would hold itself to them.

“I think one big thing that a lot of Black student leaders have been talking to each other about is that we came to this school to get an education, not to start a movement, not to change everything,” Crasta said. No matter these students’ original intentions, change came at The University of Mississippi. A monument moved, a plan was set and one of the South’s most tradition-bound universities took another step forward.
History will look back on the summer of 2020 as a time of change. After several months in quarantine, the nation was filled with pent-up energy, stifled voices and an overwhelming need to act now or act never. People were stuck inside their homes riding out the unknowns of a global pandemic, and as summer heat settled across the country, their focus shifted. Following George Floyd’s death on May 25, thousands of Americans looked up from their phones and began mobilizing for the sake of progress. Protests erupted calling out bias in law enforcement, racist policies throughout corporate America, inequity among U.S. healthcare systems and everything in between. For The University of Mississippi, its Confederate monument stood at the center of the summer’s chaos.

He was a marble soldier erected in 1906 by the Oxford chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy — a Confederate heritage group — and his fundamental purpose was to memorialize the “heroes” of Lafayette County who had died defending the Confederacy during the Civil War. Even a century ago when he rose 29 feet to look out over the heart of The University of Mississippi, though, his purpose was defunct. Those who supported the monument's creation wanted people to understand the Civil War era “as it was written” and lived by the citizens of Lafayette County, not as it would be portrayed by the Northern victors. But this was almost four decades after the Civil War had ended. Many of these women and their financiers who put up the monument had not lived through the story they were attempting to enforce, and instead, they were perpetuating the generational Lost Cause that asserts the Confederacy as a good and just cause.
It’s also important to note that Nellie Deupree, the local UDC’s chapter historian, made several public statements during a speech she gave in 1906 regarding the university’s Confederate monument about how the social advancement of Black people was a mistake.

For more than a century, the soldier peered out over the entrance to campus. Several yards behind him, the Mississippi state flag, which incorporated the Confederate flag, waved high. On Saturdays, a little less than half a mile away from the monument, students would wave Confederate flags and sing “From Dixie With Love” to cheer on the Ole Miss Rebels football team alongside the mascot Colonel Reb. Confederate symbols were intertwined with UM tradition, and even if many of those who participated didn’t support slavery or secession, The University of Mississippi was a surviving bastion for the Confederacy.

It was a place where rioting was so vitriolic that the National Guard had to descend on Oxford to restore peace after the arrival of the university’s first Black student, James Meredith, in 1962. It was a place where, in 1970, 89 Black students could get arrested for protesting inequality, where the Ku Klux Klan in 2010 felt welcome to march and where dozens of Confederate supporters felt “called” to show support for the Confederate monument. The Confederate emblems scattered across the community and held as heart-warming traditions or reminders told the perpetrators of all of these actions that they were right. These vestiges of the Confederacy also told Black students and faculty that they were secondary members of the UM community.

“Those have always been markers to say, ‘You are here, but you don't really belong,’” UM alumnus and professor W. Ralph Eubanks said. A native Mississippian, Eubanks decided to attend the university after graduating from Mount Olive High School in 1974, even though his parents were concerned about the racism he would face in Oxford, an experience that many Black students still have today. “My parents were saying to me, ‘You go there. You get that
education, and you just get out. Don't pay any attention to that stuff.’ That wasn't a really helpful thing for them to say, but also, (it made me realize), how else did Black people survive in the South? There are certain things that you knew were worth fighting for, others you knew would end up costing your life.” After four years of keeping his head down and obtaining the degree he came for in 1978, Eubanks left Mississippi the month before his 21st birthday with the intention of never returning.

“There are pieces of trauma with that that I still kind of confront, but I felt that I had to get away from it,” Eubanks said. “I worked very hard to disengage, even changing my accent, so you couldn't even tell where I was from.” He stayed away for an entire decade, not even travelling into the state to visit family, and the next time he stepped foot on The University of Mississippi campus was in 2010, when he returned as a guest lecturer.

During the intervening years, the university had taken its first major steps to untangle itself from Confederate history. University administrators ended the tradition of waving Confederate flags during football games in 1997, and six years later, they retired Colonel Reb — the cartoon white man who served as the mascot. By the time Eubanks returned to campus in 2010, the sentiment among many students — mostly white males — was that something significant had been taken from them.

“Once one thing is gone, the other thing becomes much more in the forefront of how you see the place. Then there are other things that you begin to see,” Eubanks said. “So, the Confederate flag was out, but then — as I said — it's like the next domino that falls is Colonel Reb. That goes. If you get rid of Colonel Reb, then you’ve got to get rid of the statute. All these things kind of line up.” Several more dominoes had to fall, including the state flag, before the university even considered monument relocation.
UM alumnus Phil McCausland was reporting for the student newspaper The Daily Mississippian in 2014 when talk around the flag and its Confederate emblem began on campus. “There was an undercurrent conversation, but I don’t think there was an overt conversation,” McCausland said. The same could be said for the UM community in 2017 when whispers and small protests urging the removal of the Confederate monument began.

The process to remove the flag from campus in 2015 mirrored that of relocating the monument, but in that case, change took days, not months. On October 20, the Associated Student Body Senate passed a resolution to take down the flag, and the other campus legislatures followed suit. Within days, the chancellor ordered three University Police officers to lower the flag for the last time. As they did so, the Confederate monument towered over them, only a few yards away.

Of course, years later, the advocates for relocating the monument went through the same channels of ASB, other campus government groups and the chancellor’s office, along with the added layers of the Institutions of Higher Learning Board of trustees and the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. They faced dissent. They felt anger. But they persisted until the monument was gone, and without glory. Many of those who wanted the monument to remain as a central focus on the UM campus argued that it was a symbol of Mississippi heritage. It was a relic of history that shouldn’t be changed, just as adversaries had said about Colonel Reb, the state flag and every other attempt to de-Confederize Ole Miss. While those arguments hold legitimacy to some, they exist under the looming truth that the Confederate monument and its myriad of meanings exclude minority students from making a home at the university.

“In the years since I’ve left, I think Black students in particular have really stood up in a big, big way on campus and made the claim to representation that they didn’t have before and weren’t afforded before,” McCausland said. “Maybe they felt they wouldn’t be afforded that
until they really stood up and asked for it.” After graduating from the university in 2014, McCausland went on to report for NBC News, and in part, he covered the relocation and other racial equity issues at the university. “The discussion that’s being had in Mississippi and on The University of Mississippi campus is a microcosm of the conversation we’re having nationally,” McCausland said. “If we really zoom in on it, it’s something that we all are contending with. Mississippi is having that conversation most clearly and most vocally.”

In the summer of 2020, every aspect of the national chaos was reflected in the UM community and its decades-long struggle to move the Confederate monument. Leadership ignored those who already felt voiceless, and they didn’t take the final steps to move the monument until large, majority-white organizations — like fraternities and sororities — felt compelled by current events and social media advocacy to encourage them. In the same way, it took a documented murder of a Black man at the hands of police officers and the resulting national outrage before many politicians, corporate America and educational institutions would meaningfully address bias and inequity on a large scale. During those months, Oxford became a microcosm of these turbulent issues as they played out in real-world America. Because national coverage is rare for local problems, much of the media fails to recognize the significance of change in Mississippi to the U.S. as a whole. “Mississippi is a hard state to ignore, even though it oftentimes is,” McCausland said.

Mississippi typically falls behind in many measures. U.S. News & World Report ranked it the second worst state in 2019, based on its capacity for healthcare, education, economy and opportunity, among other benchmarks. Moreover, its flagship university was one of the last to integrate in the 1960s, and President of the Confederacy Jefferson Davis once considered it home. With all of these facts, one could argue that the state seems hopeless and too far behind to
catch up to the rest of the country. But these are reasons why Mississippi matters; it serves a barometer for the nation’s progress or lack thereof.

McCausland and many of his peers cover the nation from perches in major cities like New York, Los Angeles or Washington, D.C., and he breaks the mold in that many of his fellow journalists are from those same cities. “I contend with a lot of my colleagues about the perceptions they have because they aren’t always representative of people who live in Mississippi or Iowa or central Pennsylvania,” he said. “When we don’t know something, or know a place or know people, we fall to generalizations, and sometimes worse, we fall to stereotypes. I think Mississippi is the state most brutalized by those generalizations and stereotypes, and the South as a region, moreover, falls to that as well.”

When Mississippi progresses, the nation progresses, but for non-Mississippians, many breakthroughs for the state in terms of racial advancement or equity get lost in those harmful generalizations. This understanding begets the question: Where must Mississippi and its flagship university go from here?

UM Southern Studies professor Eubanks thinks the monument relocation moved the university forward in public opinion, which lays the groundwork for progress to come. “We'll change the way people perceive us,” he said. “I don't think it's helped the way people perceive us within Mississippi, but I think it's helped the way people perceive from outside of Mississippi.” Even with the enduring ghosts of the Confederacy settled across UM’s campus, there are many Mississippians who still consider the university to be the liberal counterpart to Mississippi State University. Eubanks says he doesn’t care about those who may assert this opinion. “There are people who argue it's just a symbol, but removing those things, I think, has led to other discussions,” he said.
Eubanks is looking for the next step forward for the university to be reexamining the names of some of its buildings. Lamar Hall, for example, is named after L.Q.C. Lamar, who was a professor at the university, Confederate ambassador to Russia, member of Congress, secretary of the interior and associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. Lamar is also infamous for the role he played in reestablishing white supremacy in the South post Reconstruction. Eubanks recognized Lamar’s connection to the university, but he said he wasn’t so sure that warrants the building name. He also noted other names and phrases used by the university like “Ole Miss,” the moniker originated from the plantation era, and “Rebels,” a direct reference to the Civil War. “I think we need to have a serious conversation about what the term Ole Miss means. I have to say, I mean this is going to be almost heresy, but I'm not as I'm not as wrapped up in that as I am in the Rebels,” he said. “I've had to kind of redefine what that means for me, but I, as someone who worked in publishing for a long time and knows things about branding, it's become a brand. What I do think we have to do is we need to be honest with where that came from.”

Meanwhile, McCausland thinks the responsibility for Mississippi’s future progress lies with the university, but also the media. “People who do take the time, who visit Mississippi, who talk to the students, who really open their eyes beyond those generalizations, the stereotypes, the assumptions, they learn that there is much more to the state,” he said. “There is so much work that needs to be done there, as well, but that obviously isn’t done in a vacuum. Disregarding and ignoring is also kind of a shirking of our national responsibility to each other as Americans, as Mississippians or anything else.”

Still, he expects focus to linger on the monument for a little while longer. In its new place among the Confederate cemetery behind the Tad Smith Coliseum, the monument looks out over the football team’s practice fields. “It continues to be problematic, and I think athletes have voiced that,” McCausland said. In August of 2020, the university installed “a temporary screen”
on the side of the monument facing Manning Way and Hill Drive. The decision stemmed from conversations between Chancellor Glenn Boyce and an unnamed group of student-athletes who did not want to see the monument from the football practice fields. “In response, the university is installing a temporary screen around the monument until permanent, limited landscaping can be planted later this fall, the optimal time of year for the plantings to take root,” university spokesman Rod Guajardo said. However, the university has yet to plant trees to obstruct the view, and the “temporary” screen remains, thinly veiling the monument from view of the fields.

Some students, like NAACP chapter president Demetrius Harris still want efforts made to remove the monument from UM altogether, but others like Associated Student Body President Joshua Mannery feel deflated. “I don’t think the next piece of large scale activism exists right now,” Mannery said. “The lack of such an overwhelmingly divisive symbol in the center of campus has depleted the activism spirit that any general member of the university community was holding. We have people still talking about building names being changed and stuff, but that just doesn’t have the same feeling of inspiring people.”

The University of Mississippi does not have a clear path to overcoming the racially violent history that is ingrained in its campus. Now that the Confederate soldier is gone from his prominent post, the mass momentum that the university community gathered to take that step has dissipated. Some will advocate to change state law so that the monument may be taken off of campus for good, and more will continue to push the university to rename problematic buildings like Vardaman and Lamar halls. Minority groups will continue to ask for equal representation on campus, and the university will address all of these issues as events unfold to force its hand. Certainly, though, change is not finished at The University of Mississippi.
Before I either loved or understood The University of Mississippi, I knew that it was a divisive place. In my sixth grade history class at a public school in Birmingham, Alabama, I learned about James Meredith’s 1962 integration of the university. My teacher, Mrs. Merriwether, spoke about how some people did not believe in the equality of all races and how this belief led them to riot over a Black man enrolling at the university. She showed us photographs of Meredith walking through crowds in front of the Lyceum, guarded as bystanders shouted and raised Confederate flags at him. I remember thinking, “How could they have been so angry?”

I also remember later that year when one of my friends came to school upset that Ole Miss was changing its mascot from Colonel Reb to Rebel the Black Bear. Her parents graduated from the university years earlier, but they would make the three hour trip to cheer on the Rebels from a tent in the Grove almost every other weekend in the fall. “I just don’t understand what the big deal is? He’s just our mascot,” she said, asserting that she would continue to wear her t-shirts with Colonel Reb on them. Six years later, when I was visiting Ole Miss for the first time, she would text me, “Our tent is at the front of the Circle. Just ask people to show you where the Confederate monument is.” If only I knew then how many times I would return to that very spot to report on UM history in real time.

The little moments from my childhood when I learned about UM’s racist history or saw the misunderstanding of Confederate symbols through the eyes of an 11-year-old are now imbued with significance for me. Over the past four years, I have pulled up a front row seat to witness and record change at The University of Mississippi. When student activist groups
marched to “Take Down the Statue,” I was there. When whispers came from the Associated Student Body Senate that a resolution to relocate the monument was coming to the floor, I heard them. And each time that university administrators fumbled the process of moving the monument, I was flanked by other Daily Mississippian staff members to hold them accountable.

After hundreds of interviews, hours and words spent, I can definitively say that I understand The University of Mississippi. It is a place steeped in Southern tradition, haunted by the ghosts of the Lost Cause and claimed by neo-Confederates as one of the last vestiges of their values. If you’re a pessimist like me, these facts would make it easy to write off the university as its own lost cause. In fact, many members of the national media have already done so. However, UM is also a place where students can band together, fight for progress and win. We can recognize the flaws in the institution we love, and instead of accepting them, we can actively work to get rid of them.

When I wrote my first article about the potential relocation of UM’s Confederate monument in 2019, I did not have a strong opinion on whether or not it moved from the Circle. On one hand, I heard the Orwellian argument that the monument was a part of history, and moving it would minimize the lives lost in the Civil War. On the other, I heard people like former ASB Senator Katie Dames saying that the monument’s presence in the center of campus undermined the “inclusive and safe environment” that the university claimed to protect. Now, I am embarrassed to have ever said that I didn’t care.

Many of the people I spoke to over the past several years who supported the monument staying in the Circle refused to speak on the record, and even more of them were incorrect in their understanding of why the monument was there to begin with. Meanwhile, dozens of Black students told me that the monument indicated to them that they would never fully belong to the UM community. Some, like ambassador Mister Clemmones, even said that their families saw the
monument as a signal that campus could be unsafe for minority students. One side was fueled by heritage and the fear of hypotheticals, and the other was motivated by a want for equality and safety. Keeping that and the entirety of this thesis in mind, I’ll let you decide for yourself what UM moving its Confederate monument means for the progress of the university.

To me, though, it means one thing: Every day that The University of Mississippi has students fighting for justice is a day that Ole Miss — and subsequently, the state of Mississippi — becomes a better place.


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