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Veteran Journalist Leads Exploration of University and State

LaReeca Rucker

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Veteran Journalist Leads Exploration of University and State

Honors College class focuses on issues and progress 60 years after Meredith enrollment

DECEMBER 4, 2022 BY LAREECA RUCKER



Former civil rights activist, educator and politician Leslie-Burl McLemore speaks to students in 'The University and the State, 60 Years After the Crisis' class at the UM Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College. Led by retired journalism professor Curtis Wilkie, the class explores Mississippi's past and present. Submitted photo

OXFORD, Miss. – **University of Mississippi** students are being challenged to delve deeper into complex issues about the university and state, thanks to a special honors class designed to explore important topics 60 years after James Meredith's enrollment as UM's first Black student.

"I would describe this class as an open dialogue about the past, present and future of both the university and the state as a whole," said McKenzie Cox, a journalism and political science double-major from Concord, North Carolina, who is planning to pursue a career in broadcast news reporting and policy analysis.

"I enjoyed learning about the history of the university and the events of 1962, but hearing about modern policy issues in the state, including the fight for Medicaid expansion, the Jackson water crisis and the welfare scandal is equally impactful and relevant."

In 2012, the university's **Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College** offered a course called "Opening a Closed Society" that coincided with the 50th anniversary of Meredith's 1962 enrollment. It examined Mississippi's segregationist era, the civil rights movement, the impact of the Meredith case and strides UM had made to increase diversity.

This fall, the Honors College offered "The University and the State, 60 Years After the Crisis." Veteran journalist Curtis Wilkie, an Ole Miss student during Meredith's enrollment in 1962 who retired from teaching at the UM **School of Journalism and New Media** in 2020, returned to lead the class.

Students in the course have been exploring Mississippi's past and present. Topics have included brain drain, race relations and legislative initiatives, as well as government policies that could affect future generations.

The class has also welcomed guest speakers, including Mississippi Today journalists Adam Ganucheau and Anna Wolfe, who spoke about covering the Mississippi welfare scandal and Jackson water crisis.

"As a journalism major, I was, of course, excited to hear about their reporting," Cox said. "But I learned

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Campus Briefs

Civil Engineering Professor Receives Most-Cited Paper Award

OXFORD, Miss. – Peer recognition is a rewarding experience for anyone, but University of Mississippi researcher Amir Mehrara Molan was elated when an article he co-authored recently received the Most Cited Paper Award at the 102nd Transportation Research Board meeting in the nation's capital. The International Journal of Transportation Science and Technology presented the civil engineering

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Young Alumna Gives Back to School of Accountancy

OXFORD, Miss. – Stephanie Jennings Teague, of Chicago, sees her commitment of \$100,000 to the Patterson School of Accountancy's new building at the University of Mississippi as a means of saying "thank you." "It is a way to show a small token of my appreciation to Ole Miss, the faculty and staff, and the accounting

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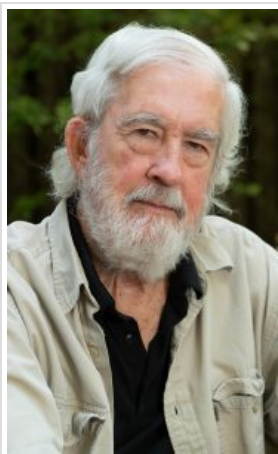
Reuters: Keep an Eye on the Money Supply

U.S. inflation roller coaster prompts fresh look at long-ignored money supply By Michael S. Derby NEW YORK – The amount of money sloshing around the U.S. economy shrank last year for the first time on record, a development that some economists believe bolsters the case for U.S. inflation pressures continuing to

even more about how important it is to ask the questions that matter in order to make sure that people in our state have access to critical information needed to make decisions for themselves.

"When I walk around campus, I can now see the history and key events that have taken place all around me that shaped the future of our nation."

Another guest speaker, former civil rights activist, educator and politician Leslie-Burl McLemore, 82, held a discussion with Wilkie about events happening across the state.



Curtis Wilkie

"I made a decision a long time ago when I was away in graduate school and living in other places that I would come back to Mississippi, and I would remain in Mississippi because I wanted to see Mississippi change," McLemore said.

"That is a strange kind of loyalty in a place where you were treated as a second-class citizen. But on the other hand, you still have this loyalty – you want to see changes made. We have come a very long way, there is no question about it, as a state; we have, in spite of the difficulties.

"We have more Black elected officials in Mississippi than any state in the union, but it reflects the population that we have. But most of us served in capacities where we really don't influence basic decision-making because all of the statewide elected officials now are Republicans. And that is going to change over time, but it is going to take a while. It's going to take greater participation by African Americans."

Before teaching at Southern University and Jackson State University, McLemore completed postdoc work at Johns Hopkins University and Harvard University. At Jackson State, he became the founding chair and professor of political science and dean of the graduate school.

"We have made incredible progress," McLemore said. "We have freedoms that people don't have in so many other countries. And I fought too hard and put my life on the line years and years ago to see us turn back the clock. I don't want to see that happen, and I hope you don't either.

"So get out there and work your butts off. Register to vote. Urge your roommates to vote and become active when you graduate from Ole Miss with this great degree. Go to law school. Go to graduate school. Get married. Build a picket fence. Be involved in your community, whether it is in Montana or Mississippi."

Kat Mooman, a biology major in the class, said she enjoyed learning about the state's history.

"Hearing the history of the University of Mississippi and its issues with the integration crisis from someone who was present during this time has been incredibly rewarding," she said. "I've thoroughly enjoyed everything we've discussed so far, but one of the most complex and pressing issues we have discussed is that of 'brain drain' in Mississippi.

"Seeing that I, myself, have strong opinions on the topic, it has been fruitful for me to hear others' educated opinions on the matter. That statement applies to every topic we have discussed as a class."

Mooman said she was aware of the basic history surrounding the university, but she has enjoyed studying issues more in-depth.

"While these topics can be controversial, knowing what is going on in our state government is something I also believe is critical in order to better understand national and even worldwide issues," she said.

Hannah Harris, a senior accountancy major from New Albany, plans to complete her master's degree in taxation at UM, then work in tax accounting for a firm.

"This class has opened my eyes to the political corruption within this state, and how many of our government officials refuse to embrace the progress that this state so desperately needs," she said.

"Before taking this class, I was not very 'in the know' about politics, especially Mississippi politics, but now, I feel as though I am more knowledgeable on why things are the way they are in Mississippi and at Ole Miss."

Harris said she is intrigued to learn more.

"I am encouraged to look more deeply into the issues amongst this state and to root for change," she said. "As we live 60 years after the integration of Ole Miss and James Meredith, it is evident that progress has definitely been made, but there is, without a doubt, a lot more work to do in bettering our state and school."

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