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Mississippi Branded Closed Society

Robert Colby Nelson

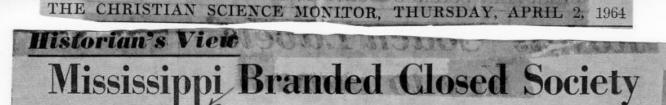
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Print this item: Mississippi Branded Closed Society



By Robert Colby Nelson Chief of the Midwest Bureau of The Christian Science Monitor

University, Miss.

One of the most controversial figures in this state today is a historian who charges that Mis-sissippi is a "closed," "totali-tarian" society. He is Prof. James W. Silver

of the University of Mississippi. One hardly expects to find such a critic on this campus, so steeped is it in the traditions of the South in general, Mis-

sissippi in particular. Frequently during the more than 25 years that Dr. Silver has been at "Ole Miss," he has spoken out against prejudice and bigotry in the affairs of Mississippi.

His charges have brought

his charges have brought countless angry rebuttals. "I believe that I am doing a great service by telling the truth," he recently remarked to a student reporter at "Ole Miss." "I am concerned with reality, not a public image."

Views Categorized

in the interview published last December in The Mississip-pian, the school newspaper.

He has been called a radical and an Uncle Tom. He categorizes his politics as conserva-

tive middle of the road. "I think the Negro should have equality of opportunity and equality before the law, he says. "All citizens should be treated alike—they are not in Mississippi. It's immoral and indecent that someone should be required to serve in the sippians have had no real rea-Army without being allowed son to believe that they were

deep distress over conditions and when they now discover in the state he replied: that all their bluster and sub-

Some days I'm loyal to the school and some days I'm mad enough at someone to stay just to irritate him.

Conflict Seen

In the past five months such irritations appear to have reached a peak. Last Nov. have 7 Preached a peak, Last Nov. 7, Dr. Silver addressed the Southern Historical Associa-tion (of which he was then president) in Asheville, N.C. His subject—"Mississippi: The Closed Society."

[His book under the same title is to be published in May.] May.]

was a 43-page searching, documented, hard-

sippi in the Confederacy" as a memorial to the confederacy in addition to three other books. And he was one of those who started the Mississippi Historical Society.

Mississippi leaders, however, were furious with his "closed society" speech. One newspaper

columnist labeled the professor's attitudes "heavy propaganda for com-pulsory race-mixing."

Mississippi congressman, while not mentioning the professor by name, left little doubt whom he had in mind when he called for "Mississippi to fumi-gate its college staffs" and replace the casualties "with professors who will teach Americanism and not foreign ideologies."

A former governor derided the speech.

Students and others, skipping over the full import and breadth of the long statement, "I have given all my adult chided the professor about his life to this school," he went on freedom to speak out in such freedom to speak out in such a "closed society."

Address Criticized

Many Mississippi newspapers "This is more my school than anyone else's on campus." either ignored the address or criticized it without thoroughly criticized it without thoroughly reporting its contents. As this is written, its impact continues to nettle the state. The follow-ing may fairly be said to be major summary points made by Dr. Silver in his remarks: "For more than a century Mississippians have refused to bound by the be national will.

"Since Reconstruction Missis-Ariny without being anowed son to believe that they wither to participate in the workings not free to handle the race of his society." question as they wished, with-Asked why he remains at out meaningful interference "Ole Miss," in the light of his from the federal government; terfuge and intransigeance will avail them nothing, they have little to fall back on except blind rage and fierce hatred.

'In committing itself to the defense of the biracial system, Mississippi has erected a to-talitarian society which to the present moment has eliminated the ordinary processes by which change may be chan-neled. Through its police power, coercion and force prevail instead of accommodation, and the result is social paralysis. Thus, the Mississippian who prides himself on his individuality in reality lives in a cli-mate where nonconformity is forbidden, where the white hitting warning of worsening conflict ahead in Mississippi.

sippi ever to be elected presi- not dare to express a devi- lieve," the professor asserts, dent of the Southern Historical ating opinion without looking "that they will somehow de-Association. He wrote "Missis- over his shoulder.... velon the cambility to free

Intolerance Charged Negro but because of its closed home. While complaining of its government." own persecuted minority station rarely considers the Negro asked. minority as having rights in "Civ Mississippi.

Silence Deplored

"With the great silence from the men of good will," Dr. Sil-ver concludes, "and the disposition of the good people to let things run their course, there can be little hope for anything constructive in Mis-sissippi in the next decade, ... "There is small reason to be-

velop the capability to [re-"Mississippi is the way it is sume their obligations to the not because of its views on the nation] themselves, to do it, as Faulkner says, in time. If not, society, its refusal to allow freedom of inquiry or to toler-ate 'error of opinion.' The so-cial order that refused to con-sive aid of the country as a form to national standards in- whole, backed by the power sists upon strict conformity at and authority of the federal home While complaining of its government"

What is the outlook, then, in the United States, it for Mississippi today? he was

"Civil rights workers in Mis-sissippi," he remarked to this reporter, "instead of being defeated are more aggressive than ever. And on the other side, the 'status quo boys' also are more determined than ever. I foresee a full confrontation ahead."

One of a series of articles on Mississippi.

