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WHO HAS A VOICE: ISSUES OF FREE SPEECH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI FROM 1955-1970

by
Neale Grisham

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
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Approved by

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ABSTRACT

WHO HAS A VOICE: Issues of Free Speech at the University of Mississippi from 1955-1970

(Under the direction of Rebecca Marchiel)

Amidst the upheaval of American society in the 1960s, the University of Mississippi's administration found itself in a precarious position. A long-standing institution that prided itself on its ties to the Old South, the university was being challenged by integrationists and liberal notions of equality and social justice. The university was forced to decide between abetting the alumni that padded university pockets and the tides of change that were rippling through the university campus. Their main way of combatting this was through the surveilling of students and the vetting of potential guest speakers who may spread "controversial ideas." While students tended to be in favor of allowing anyone on campus to speak, university officials and alumni saw this as a potential threat against the Mississippi "way of life." As a means of appeasing overbearing alumni and state government officials, the university began taking measures to limit free speech on campus, thus lessening the spread of liberal ideas. This thesis provides an in-depth look into the actions the university took to limit free speech on campus between 1955 and 1970.

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INTRODUCTION

It was the decade of integration and space travel, of sit-ins and speaking out, of protest and change. The 1960s saw the transformation of American society as the Black Freedom Struggle gained traction across the American South, the battle over communism both domestic and abroad erupted into a costly war, and mass movements for inclusion started growing like never before. The decade saw the election of the youngest president and his subsequent assassination, his dream of Civil Rights legislation codified into law under his successor, and the election of a diehard conservative career politician. It saw the rise of television, the legal desegregation of public areas across the South, and the British takeover of American pop culture.

But this change did not happen overnight, and in fact, all change requires due credit to the “movers and shakers” of the period. “The decade of protest and change” did not happen because Americans were content with their lives. In fact, the decade proves that the era’s youth, the first of the post-war baby boomers to come of age, was convinced that American society that had prospered following World War II needed a sudden change. Societal norms were being challenged, especially those that resulted in the repression of black people and women. The most avid supporters of these changes wrote history as they sat on the front lines, demanding respect for their voices and those who were silenced.

When one thinks of the massive social changes of the 1960s, one remembers the efforts made at Kent State by students protesting the war. One thinks of historically elite academic institutions like Columbia, where students banded together to oppose controversial weapons research amidst the global Cold War. And while these examples of active and

revolutionary student protests clearly were successful in exemplifying student resistance, it does not necessarily tell the whole story.

In Mississippi, a hotbed of racial tension dating back to its founding in 1817, the 1960s were the beginning of a drastic structural realignment. Following the end of federal involvement in Reconstruction in the years after the Civil War, the South had codified a white supremacist power structure through Jim Crow laws that limited the rights of newly freedmen and women. These laws were enforced by numerous groups, including vigilante justice organizations that included some of the South's most ardent racists, whose sole mission was to perpetuate white power. This very power structure was strengthened by generations of practice. In the 1950s and 60s, however, the first spark of the revolution set ablaze a rejuvenated interest in the Black Freedom Struggle. Groups across the state and South organized together for the cause.

Because of the deep entrenchment of racial codes in the state, Mississippi took a long time to begin to dismantle the racial power structure. While many historians have tracked the importance of the organizing tradition in Mississippi's black freedom struggle, Mississippi is often looked over as an example of organized social activism and change on college campuses. This thesis serves to correct this misconception. Several historians, such as Jeffrey A. Turner and others in the edited volume *Rebellion in Black and White: Southern Student Activism in the 1960s*, have made the argument that several major academic institutions in the South were crucial activists for social justice, both on their campus and nationwide. However, the University of Mississippi, the flagship university in the state, is often left out of

history books, despite several significant acts of organized activism on campus throughout the ‘60s and early ‘70s.

The University of Mississippi was founded in 1848 to be the premier academic institution for the sons of the wealthy Southern elite. In fear that young Southern men, who had previously been educated in elite Ivy League institutions, might be exposed to anti-establishment, abolitionist teachings, the University of Mississippi was founded in order to educate young men on how to perpetuate the antebellum “Southern way of life.” Throughout the next century, the idealization of the Old South was a significant part of the university experience. The title of the yearbook “The Ole Miss”[1] was a reference to the title enslaved workers used to reference their enslaver’s wives and “mistresses” of the plantation. Lost Cause enthusiasts dedicated a monument to the students who served the Confederacy as soldiers, erecting it at the main entrance of the campus and symbolically marking it as white space. The University of Mississippi was literally founded on the ideals of white supremacy. Dismantling white supremacy there was a tall order. Yet in the 1960s, college students took it on. Their struggles to change the campus is the story told here.

When historians do consider activism for social justice at the University of Mississippi, they often start and stop with the story of James Meredith. In 1962, amidst the nationwide Black Freedom Struggle, James Meredith, a veteran and Mississippi native, longed for the education that was only provided for the white students of Mississippi at the time. Though he was a top student at his historically black university, he wanted to transfer and receive the best education his own state had to offer. He decided to transfer to the

[1] Kate Royals, "Ole Miss nicknames lives on," *The Clarion Ledger*, August 1, 2014.

University of Mississippi, and even was admitted, but was stopped due to his race. Meredith chose to challenge this decision, and eventually received national attention - and even that of the Kennedy administration. Robert F. Kennedy, the nation's attorney general, became personally invested in the case. Despite national legal backing, Meredith still faced significant opposition. Eventually, Kennedy, with the help of segregationist governor Ross Barnett, forcibly integrated the University of Mississippi through the use of federal marshals. This show of force ultimately resulted in a massive riot on the university campus, resulting in two deaths and significant property damage to the university. The situation was clear: anyone who wanted to challenge the status quo in Mississippi was not going to go without a fight.

As the Meredith story reveals, the University of Mississippi, during the struggle for black freedom, was a battleground over the future of the racial order in the South. Being the flagship institution for the state of Mississippi, and one founded on the ideals of the Old South, it was the center of significant racial tension and struggle. But this contest extended well beyond the singular case over Meredith's admission. Instead, as the Civil Rights movement spread throughout the South, university officials were forced to make choices that appeased both the conservative Mississippi elite and the more liberal factions of the state that were pressing for equality - and everyone in between. While some of these choices were framed as "civil rights" issues, a broader and overlapping segment of university debates addressed questions of freedom of speech. Indeed, in the midst of struggles to upend Mississippi's racist status quo, university administrators, students, professors, and alumni raised crucial questions about who had the right to speak, and more importantly, who had the right to shape the minds of Mississippi's future.

This thesis begins to tackle issues of free speech on campus and the university's response from the beginning of the classical phase of the Civil Rights movement in Mississippi until the events culminating in the arrest of the university's early Black Student Union leaders in 1970. The first chapter offers an in-depth look into the invitation of Robert F. Kennedy to speak on the university campus, an act of defiance by the university's group of diehard liberals who seeked to challenge university - and eventually, statewide governmental - authority. The second chapter looks at various attempts made by university officials to limit what they saw as controversial speech on campus, which would later inspire a statewide Speaker Ban on university campuses. The third chapter looks at the university's response to the first black empowerment group on campus, the Black Student Union, and how the university chose to respond to the challenges posed by the black student organization - by the surveillance and ultimately, the arrest and expulsion of several prominent black student organizers.

CHAPTER I: “A CHICKEN PUT IN A FOX HOUSE”

His name was in the national headlines and on the minds of the country’s leading Democrats. Since his brother’s assassination in 1963, Robert F. Kennedy had quickly taken hold of the Kennedy political empire and rose to prominence as New York’s junior senator, and it was clear in 1966 that a presidential campaign was on the horizon.[2] Despite his popularity, Kennedy remained a controversial figure - even within his own party.[3] He took bold stances on many of the divisive issues of the day, including the looming threat of nuclear warfare and foreign policy concerning communism. But his reputation as an advocate for civil rights would be the driving force behind his visit to Mississippi.

Kennedy took a particular interest in the civil rights movement. While attorney general under his brother John F. Kennedy’s presidential administration, he became involved with numerous voting rights cases as well as the large-scale integration of one of the South’s public universities, the University of Mississippi. Yet many civil rights activists considered his efforts to be insufficient. Despite the legal effort that Kennedy carried out in these cases, he still seemed to assume the inferiority of black Americans. Some of the nation’s most prominent newspapers such as the New York Times published articles quoting Kennedy as calling majority-black urban neighborhoods “riot-prone ghettoes,” racially coded language that suggested residents were irrationally violent. He suggested such communities should be closed down instead of solving what Kennedy himself claims to be “deeper issues.”[4] Less

[2] Richard Witkin, "Kennedy Is Seen Heading a Convention Slate," *The New York Times*, May 4, 1966, 33.
[3] This includes his notable “feud” with then-president Lyndon Banes Johnson.
[4] Richard J. H. Johnston, "KENNEDY WARNS ON NEGRO REVOLT," *The New York Times*, January 21, 1966, 51.

than a month later, the Times reported that Kennedy was "harassed" by citizens of Bedford-Stuyvesant in New York City, who demanded more of their senator than empty promises of money that one day might be funneled into the community.[5] Though he was once a civil rights ally, by 1966, Kennedy's popularity amongst African Americans was fading.

The strained relationship between Robert Kennedy and civil rights activists marked a departure from its strength just four years earlier. 1962 was the height of John F. Kennedy's presidency. Robert Kennedy had served as the nation's attorney general since his brother came to office. He had vigorously stepped into the position, blowing through many court cases. Although he had only held the position for a little over two years, Robert Kennedy had successfully carried out many cases against voter registration obstructions across the South. Upon hearing of James Meredith's numerous, unsuccessful attempts to register for classes at the University of Mississippi, Kennedy quickly chose to get his brother's administration involved and pursue university integration as another route to advance the goals of the civil rights movement. In Mississippi, Kennedy's involvement in the state's politics in 1962 provoked a backlash from many of the state's white residents. They had come to resent him as a meddling outsider and hold that position well after this moment had passed.

Though unknown at the time, Kennedy had worked privately with the state's notoriously segregationist governor to try to provide a safe enrollment experience for Meredith. Upon the request of Governor Ross Barnett, Kennedy called upon the backing of dozens of federal marshals to allow for Meredith to safely enroll at the university, making him the first black man to integrate the "Ole Miss" campus. Though Kennedy and Barnett

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[5] Ralph Blumenthal, "Brooklyn Negroes Harass Kennedy," *The New York Times*, February 5, 1966, 17.

expected some backlash, no one could have prepared for the riots that broke out on the campus the night of Meredith's official registration. These riots resulted in two deaths and thousands of dollars' worth of destroyed property. Whether he liked it or not, Kennedy's name would go down into history books in association with this tragic event.

With all the harsh feelings in the state, especially amongst segregationists, it surprised many that the University of Mississippi's Law School Speakers Bureau (LSSB) chose to invite Kennedy to give a speech on the university campus in 1966. Filmmaker Mary Blessey has hypothesized that Kennedy was invited precisely because of the role he played in the university's integration.[6] In her master's thesis, Blessey suggests that a small faction of the university's liberal law students knew that Barnett was seeking reelection as governor and his record on integration mattered. Barnett was generally loved across Mississippi for his tough anti-integration stance, and so he stood a fighting chance for reelection. The students wanted to invite Kennedy as an indirect attack on Barnett. They wanted to hear Kennedy's perspective - with the goal of implicating Barnett's role as being instrumental in Meredith's enrollment and thus exposing Barnett for lying when he presented himself as an unwavering segregationist. More importantly, these students wanted to show that Barnett should be held accountable for the subsequent white riot on campus[7] Hindsight shows that plan was faulty - the only proof they had against Barnett was the rumor that someone had kept recordings of the phone calls allegedly shared by Kennedy and Barnett. But the law students hoped a Kennedy visit to campus would pay dividends.

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[6] Mary Blessey, "Truth Marching On: Robert F. Kennedy at the University of Mississippi," (master's thesis, The University of Mississippi, 2019), 6.
[7] Blessey "Truth," 6.

In inviting Kennedy, the law students created a problem that needed solving: how to get Kennedy to campus without violating the school's Speaker Ban - a policy which required school administrators to vet invited speakers before they were allowed to speak on campus. In an interview with her father, Gerald Blessey, who was a member of the LSSB and nicknamed the university's "campus liberal," Mary Blessey discovered that it was a game of chance. The LSSB, though mostly at the hands of Blessey, submitted a list of a diverse range of political thinkers to the university administration. Thinking Kennedy would never accept an invitation, the university's chancellor, J.D. Williams, signed the document allowing it to pass. Kennedy, who previously met with a university student through the state's NAACP, had already been made aware of the situation, and promptly accepted.[8]

Kennedy's acceptance led to a flurry of reactions from students, alumni, and other groups invested in what his invitation suggested about the university's institutional identity. Student responses to Kennedy's visit were varied because the opinions of Kennedy himself were varied. Though the campus climate had many differing viewpoints politically, both sides of the aisle - as well as everyone in between - worried about what was to come of Kennedy's visit. Some students worried that the violence that characterized the University's integration would also mark Kennedy's visit. In their minds, Kennedy's visit could not be disentangled from James Meredith's arrival on campus back in 1962.

Given this context, some students circulated an anonymous leaflet that called for those who chose to protest to do so civilly.[9] Though the anonymous author stated that he

[8] Blessey "Truth," 15-16.
[9] "Kampus Komment," Box 19, Folder 1, George M. Street Collection, Archives and Special Collections at the University of Mississippi. Oxford, MS.

disagreed with Kennedy's political views, he acknowledged that the university should respect everyone's right to voice their opinions. In doing so, he suggested a demonstration in which protestors should pin either a strip of red fabric or paper onto their lapels as a seemingly small civil protest Kennedy's politics. This small act had a much larger meaning: the student claimed to have chosen red to represent the "bloodshed" that occurred on campus the night of the integration--blood he believed was on Kennedy's hands. This anonymous student and, according to him, "most of [his] fellow students," attributed the violence and deaths to the Kennedy administration, and Robert F. Kennedy in particular, as those officials oversaw the integration.[10] The Kennedy name had been tarnished in the eyes of many university students – and many other Mississippians, as well.

The pamphlet author was not alone in his efforts to frame the Kennedy visit as antithetical to the university's culture and values. In a poem by "Betty Coed" Kathleen Chandler, she parodied the classic holiday poem "The Night Before Christmas" to satirically critique university administration and "scholars" for their hand in arranging Kennedy's visit to the university.[11] According to the poem, the campus was very tense leading up to the speech, many worried about the actions of "Mississippi extremists." Chandler addressed her university administration and "psychotic" professors and asked them to consider their choice to allow Kennedy onto campus. She wrote of how the days of the Old South have seemingly slipped away, only to be replaced with protests and violence. Mississippi, to her, was merely left reeling – men seemingly having recognized their changing world while women were

[10] "Kampus Komment," Box 19, Folder 1, George M. Street Collection, Archives and Special Collections at the University of Mississippi. Oxford, MS.
[11] Unnamed poem by Kathleen Chandler, Box 19, Folder 1, George M. Street Collection, Archives and Special Collections at the University of Mississippi. Oxford, MS.

nothing more than flippant – and willing to “follow any who’ll lead.”[12] She ended the poem with a warning for Kennedy – Mississippians were waiting, and praying that little harm might come to them.

These two examples of student responses to Kennedy’s visit demonstrate the intensity and divisiveness felt amongst the campus community prior to the speech. While many of the students may have disliked Kennedy, they nonetheless respected his authority. At the same time, they were afraid of the extremist violence that his visit might provoke on their campus. Whereas the University of Mississippi at the time was notoriously conservative and resistant to integration, many students believed that it was important to at least listen to Kennedy. Many saw it was a democratic ideal to allow everyone, regardless of opinion, a place to speak. The role of a university was supposed to be in encouraging the development of new ideas, yet the University of Mississippi - or rather, the Board of Trustees of Higher Learning in the state - saw it as their mission to keep young adults from encountering ideas that challenged what they saw as Mississippi’s values.

Given the context of youth politics on the national level, it is no wonder why the more conservative members of the state’s government might want to thwart Kennedy’s visit. Just two years before the Kennedy invitation, students at the University of California at Berkeley had staged a radical anti-Vietnam War protest.[13] The war was proving to be very unpopular amongst the youngest generation, especially as they were the first in line to be sent overseas. In addition to that, the Black Freedom Struggle had slowly started shifting towards

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[12] Unnamed poem by Kathleen Chandler, Box 19, Folder 1, George M. Street Collection, Archives and Special Collections at the University of Mississippi. Oxford, MS.
[13] Norris R. Johnson and William E. Feinberg, "Youth Protest in the 60s: An Introduction," *Sociological Focus* 13, no. 3 (August 1980): 174.

a Black Power movement at the hands of young activists, which intimidated segregationists. It is important to note that primarily all of these protests took place at universities and were student-led.[14] So far, Mississippi college students had not publicly shared these sentiments. But inviting liberals like Kennedy to campus might open up space for liberal or radical voices to change that reality.

It is interesting to consider how the younger Mississippians were seemingly more willing to allow Kennedy to voice his opinions than older Mississippians, as demonstrated through the numerous letters sent by university alumni to the chancellor at the time, J.D. Williams. Perhaps the most resistant to Kennedy's visit were the school's alumni. In several terse and indignant letters to university administration, angry former students questioned the university's decision and asked for Kennedy's invitation to be repealed. The alumni begged for the school to cancel his visit – often citing his role in the integration for why he should be barred from visiting campus. To put it simply, the alumni refused to give up the past – and would stop at nothing to make sure the university did not forget what happened in 1962.

Virtually all of the negative responses to Kennedy's visit were made by segregationists or those who disagreed with Kennedy politically. For many alumni, the Kennedy name was associated with the forceful integration of the university. By 1966, the segregationist cause was failing, but many resented the changing world – and blamed the Kennedy brothers for their role in it. In a letter to J.D. Williams by a Port Gibson alum, P. H.

[14] Johnson and Feinberg, "Youth Protest," 174-175.

Warton begged for the school to rescind his invitation to speak on the grounds of "what [Kennedy] did to the school."[15]

However, some of the negative responses were coming from outside of the state. In another letter fielded by the chancellor's office, an angry alum cited an incident in which former Mississippi governor Ross Barnett was humiliated during a speech at a "leftist" school in New York. The author of the letter, George L. Roberts, adamantly disapproved of Kennedy's visit to the university, claiming that "free speech" only applied to "extreme leftists and commies." Roberts even urged Chancellor Williams to cancel the event, claiming that his intention was to prevent a riot and protect Kennedy from harm.[16] While it is unclear if Roberts was an alum of the university, he obviously aligned himself with the popular politics of the state and felt authority enough to personally ask the university chancellor to reassess his decision. Roberts appeared to be desperate in preventing Kennedy from speaking to the students, feeling as though his political opinions were ignored by the university under the guise of "free speech" in allowing "extreme leftists" to speak.

In a similar vein to the supposed intent of Roberts' letter, another alum of the university wrote to the chancellor in hopes of cancelling Kennedy's visit out of safety concerns. Ruth Odell West, who wrote to the university soon after Kennedy's visit was announced, begged Williams to withdraw Kennedy's welcome. Though West uses a very neutral tone in her letter, it is clear she, too, worries about the safety of the New York

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[15] Letter to J.D. Williams from P.H. Wharton. 16 Feb 1966. Box 19, Folder 1. George M. Street Collection. Archives and Special Collections at J.D. Williams Library, University of Mississippi. Oxford, MS.

[16] Letter to J.D. Williams from George L. Roberts. 17 Feb 1966. Box 19, Folder 1. George M. Street Collection. Archives and Special Collections at J.D. Williams Library, University of Mississippi. Oxford, MS.

senator. West makes it a point to acknowledge Kennedy as "a man of courage" who would not decline an invitation to speak despite his unpopularity in the state. Interestingly, West seems to feel the need to protect Kennedy, though she makes no clear stance on her political views. She does, however, make it a point to establish the university's responsibility in protecting Kennedy from what "could lead to tragedy, and disgrace."[17]

To members of the university community, and the state at large, the memory of the violence that erupted following the integration in 1962 was a scar that would not heal. The constant fear of "violence" that might result from Kennedy's visit was frequently weaponized as a means of reminding everyone what Kennedy was allegedly responsible for in the past. From a political standpoint, this was a crucial tactic used by segregationists: reminding everyone what would happen if the supposed "natural order of things" was toppled. Besides the riot in 1962, there was no further evidence of any sort of violence that broke out on the university campus. Yet in an ironic twist, segregationists used the absence of physical violence to bolster their argument. They suggested that the relative peace on campus proved how important it was to maintain the status quo. They framed the (white) riot against Meredith not as evidence that Mississippi's struggle for black equality was met with hatred, but instead as evidence that the Kennedys had been unreasonable for pushing the state too far.

Beyond preventing the alleged harm of university students, anti-Kennedy alumni and state residents were also overly concerned with protecting the university's "reputation." The

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[17] Letter to J.D. Williams from Ruth Odell West. 17 Feb 1966. Box 19, Folder 1. George M. Street Collection. Archives and Special Collections at J.D. Williams Library, University of Mississippi. Oxford, MS.

university was a beacon of glorification of the Old South, but many conservatives worried that integration and social equality could jeopardize their shrine to white supremacy. Conservative Mississippians were concerned that their beloved institution that catered to their belief in the Lost Cause was fading away at the hands of liberal politicians. Therefore, the invitation of one of the most popular liberals to speak at their campus was risking their reputation of being one of the last institutions dedicated to the ways of the Old South. To many, it served as a reminder of the war they had lost a century before. Indeed, much of the backlash from alumni revolved around preserving the University of Mississippi's persona as one of the last remaining beacons of the Old South institutions. For many, choosing to allow Kennedy to speak – after his complete violation of Mississippi's segregation policies in 1962 – was a slap in the face and an opportunity for liberal politicians to "have their way" with campus politics.

But it was more than reputation that was at stake for those who opposed Kennedy. Another concern was that the minds of the university's young students might be susceptible to the racial liberalism that Kennedy symbolized. In a scathing letter from a disgruntled Southerner, W. E. Davis implored Chancellor Williams to prohibit Robert Kennedy "and his kind… from [speaking to] the young people of our beloved Southland."[18] W. E. Davis, who appears to have limited (if any) connection with the university, admonishes Williams for even considering inviting "their kind" to visit the state, much less to try and speak to the student body. Davis was a veteran of World War I, like his grandfather before him who was a

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[18] Letter from W. E. Davis to Chancellor Williams. 18 Feb 1966. Box 19, Folder 1. George M. Street Collection. Archives and Special Collections at J.D. Williams Library, University of Mississippi. Oxford, MS.

veteran of the Civil War and fought at battles such as Shiloh and Missionary Ridge. Davis' felt the need to build rapport in this way, by acknowledging his family's ties to the Old South and thus position himself as a "true Southerner" or one who understands the old ways is a powerful insight to the mindset of Mississippians at the time.

As the world began to change around them and the Black Freedom Struggle in Mississippi was coming to a head, many conservatives felt a dire need to preserve the "old ways" through places of higher education. The University of Mississippi, with its proud display of the Confederate battle flag and its emblem of an honorable Mississippi Colonel as its mascot, was proof that the South had not yet lost – there was still means of preserving an Old South in Mississippi, if one only chose to honor it by attending the university. Perhaps that's why alumni were so quick to defend the university for resisting integration or Kennedy's visit; the last untainted part of the South as they knew it was also reeling with the tides of change – but this time, alumni were unsure that they could stop it.

Alumni were quick to draw on this experience upon hearing the news of his expected speech. A letter addressed from married couple Robert and Mary Margaret Biggerstaff highlighted Kennedy's involvement with the tense climate that erupted in "conditions which led to the riots on campus in September, 1962 [sic]."[19] The Biggerstaffs in particular seem to believe that even allowing Kennedy to speak in the state allows him "a sense of acceptance [for his actions]" among Mississippians that "he surely does not have."[20]

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[19] Letter from R. D. and M. M. E. Biggerstaff to J. D. Williams, 12 Feb 1966, Box 19, Folder 1. George M. Street Collection. Archives and Special Collections at J.D. Williams Library, University of Mississippi. Oxford, MS.

[20] Letter from R. D. and M. M. E. Biggerstaff to J. D. Williams, 12 Feb 1966, Box 19, Folder 1. George M. Street Collection. Archives and Special Collections at J.D. Williams Library, University of Mississippi. Oxford, MS.

The Biggerstaffs, like many others, were worried that Kennedy had the "wrong attitude" about the sort of policies the state should enact, and students should support. The Biggerstaffs likely held onto the notion that the university was a place for educating the Southern elite about Southern values; that the university should be untainted by Northern ideas or practices. Under the guise of worrying about the university's "publicity," the Biggerstaffs call upon the Chancellor to rescind Kennedy's invitation to speak at the university, as in doing so could put the independence of the state's beloved institution of higher learning at risk.

The Biggerstaffs and many other alumni perhaps had reason to feel this way. The university itself was worrying about the slow liberalization of the student body and its politics and losing their last significant tie to the Old South way of life. The university was means of exercising a state-run institution without outside pressures, so any undue outside influences were often interpreted as a threat to what realtor J. W. McArthur called "our great state."[21]

Many alumni were part of distinguished Mississippi families that went back for generations. Loss of the state's infamous black-white binary and resulting power structure meant that generational wealth and their power was at risk of extinction. McArthur likely associated Kennedy with this loss, as did many others, so the possibility of his address to the university stood for much more than the one-time speech he would give. McArthur saw Kennedy and his work as going against Mississippians, as evidenced by his letter demanding

[21] Letter from J. W. McArthur to J.D. Williams. 16 Feb 1966. Box 19, Folder 1. George M. Street Collection. Archives and Special Collections at J.D. Williams Library, University of Mississippi. Oxford, MS.

that he be disinvited from the university and otherwise unwelcomed in the entire state.[22] McArthur literally begged the university to take back their invitation to the extent in which it seems that McArthur was panicking that his state is falling victim to an outside influencer – one who at his core has no problem with insulting Mississippi or "Her people [sic]."[23]

What McArthur chose to do with his letter went beyond what several of his fellow alumni and like-minded individuals did. McArthur concluded his letter with the fact that he carbon-copied the document and sent it on to several state senators and representatives, as well as a judge. By bringing state authority into this, he seemingly reminded the university that it was a state institution that had to answer to state authorities, being a public university. Choosing to openly remind the chancellor's office of this fact can almost be construed as threatening in nature, reminding Chancellor Williams who he is to submit to.

The university was at an impasse. On one side of the spectrum, conservative alumni and state politicians were demanding for the university to suspend Kennedy's speech. On the other, a group of radical young law students pleaded for a chance to have another political perspective heard. Many students were in the middle. Some agreed with Kennedy, some did not, but nearly all believed that free speech was a strong American value that the university should uphold. Chancellor J.D. Williams was in the hot seat: would he allow Kennedy's visit and support the principle of free speech, as many students framed the visit, or would he appease the alumni and, more importantly, earn the support of their wallets?

[22] Letter from J. W. McArthur to J.D. Williams. 16 Feb 1966. Box 19, Folder 1. George M. Street Collection. Archives and Special Collections at J.D. Williams Library, University of Mississippi. Oxford, MS.
[23] Letter from J. W. McArthur to J.D. Williams. 16 Feb 1966. Box 19, Folder 1. George M. Street Collection. Archives and Special Collections at J.D. Williams Library, University of Mississippi. Oxford, MS.

A few days before Kennedy was set to speak, the university's Office of Public Information released a statement notifying the student body – and the entire state – that Kennedy's visit would occur on March 18th, 1966. However, the event was only available to the students and faculty of the university.[24] The issued document was peculiar in some ways. Throughout the press release, the university made it clear that space for the audience was limited, making a conscious effort to bar the event from the general populace. Space was even limited for members of the media, who were only allowed attendance if all seats were not filled. This limitation of press involvement could be considered another form of censorship.

The day arrived and everything went according to plan - that is, the plan set forth by Kennedy and the rest of the Law School's Speakers' Bureau. Kennedy and Ethel, his wife, were met in Oxford by an adoring crowd, which surprised them. According to the *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, Kennedy "didn't hurry at all" when meeting with them.[25] After a brief driving tour around Oxford and its most impoverished neighborhoods,[26] Kennedy met with several student organizations before being received at an alumni's house for lunch. Members of the LSSB recalled both Kennedy and his wife shaking hands with everyone present, including the black members of the alumni's kitchen staff. This was a shock to the students, but it became clear that Kennedy aimed to signal his commitment to improving race

[24] Typescript of publicity statement from the University of Mississippi, 1966, Box 19, Folder 1, George Street Collection, University of Mississippi Archives and Special Collections, University, Mississippi.
[25] Clip from Memphis Press-Scimitar, 19 March 1966. Box 19, Folder 2, George Street Collection, University of Mississippi Archives and Special Collections, University, Mississippi.
[26] Anti-poverty legislature was a passion project of Kennedy's during his time as a senator of New York.

relations.[27] Following the lunch, Kennedy continued to the Tad Smith Coliseum for his speech.

Over 5,000 people attended Robert F. Kennedy's speech, including press both local and international. To many, Kennedy's arrival was a step forward; a ceremonious peace offering following the events of 1962. Kennedy carefully crafted a moderate message encouraging young people to stay civilly engaged, and the speech went over very well, despite an even-tempered approach that encouraged the audience to be open to civil rights. And, according to plan, Kennedy opened the floor to questions.[28] Immediately, he received a staged question from the law school students about who, in Kennedy's opinion, was responsible for the riots of 1962. Kennedy, saving political face as planned, deftly dodged the question, so as to not appear too eager to implicate the state's governor for working with the Kennedy administration.

When pressed, however, Kennedy immediately began divulging details about the numerous calls that he conducted with then-Governor Ross Barnett. Kennedy cited numerous examples of Barnett's willingness to work with him in order to orchestrate the event. Despite the overwhelming amount of segregationist loyalty to Barnett, the audience was extremely receptive to Kennedy's words. In order to not appear too staged, Kennedy also answered several other questions about issues such as the Vietnam War. According to an anonymous journalist, "his speech wasn't long, but he answered questions for an hour, and didn't dodge a

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[27] Blessey, "Marching On," 18.
[28] Blessey, "Marching On," 20.

single one."[29] Kennedy seemingly impressed the crowd with several jokes, including comparing himself to "a chicken [put] in a fox house."[30] He received an extremely warm response, and was met by standing ovation. The plan by the LSSB was carried out deftly, and seemingly the audience were unaware of the law students' original agenda.

Following Kennedy's visit, J.D. Williams asked the campus newspaper, *The Mississippian*, to allow him to address the student body about the speech.[31] Williams repeatedly acknowledged the student body's generosity and bipartisanship for allowing Kennedy to speak and appreciated their lack of protest or commotion over the visit. Williams noted how controversial Kennedy was on a national scale, and with the insight that the University of Mississippi was not an especially progressive institution, thanked the students for their civility. Williams believed that the students should look on the event with pride: after all, their level-headedness and intellectual discussion gave such acclaim to the university.

The entire event was a particularly bold move on Kennedy's part. His wife, Ethel, sat beside him nervously throughout the speech and following questions. She remained this way until the crowd issued their applause, where she appeared to be "surprised… and pleased -- at the reception [Kennedy] got." In fact, following the event, the students appeared to swarm

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[29] Clip from Memphis Press-Scimitar, 19 March 1966. Box 19, Folder 2, George Street Collection, University of Mississippi Archives and Special Collections, University, Mississippi.
[30] Clip from Memphis Press-Scimitar, 19 March 1966. Box 19, Folder 2, George Street Collection, University of Mississippi Archives and Special Collections, University, Mississippi.
[31] Draft of column sent to The Mississippian by J.D. Williams, undated, Box 19, Folder 1, George Street Collection, University of Mississippi Archives and Special Collections, University, Mississippi.

the couple "in friendly fashion" with more questions and in hopes of meeting the pair. While Robert may have wooed the crowd with his speech, Ethel proved just as charismatic, making jokes with some of the students.[32]

Kennedy's visit to the University of Mississippi was quite the spectacle, as was reflected in *The Mississippian*. The week following his speech, the student newspaper included several different articles and photo sets regarding the visit. The front page of the newspaper included a large picture of Kennedy signing autographs on what appears to be the university campus.[33] The photo is captioned "Opens 'closed society,'" a clear reference to the controversial book published just two years prior to the visit by university history professor James W. Silver about the events of the campus' integration.[34] The "closed society" referred to Mississippi's refusal to modernize in the 1960s and the state's tendency to perpetuate a white, elitist power structure.

The caption, nearly a paragraph long, details Kennedy's visit in abstract. The student journalists noted his "confident but apprehensive" attitude about appearing on the campus for the first time since the riots that resulted in the deaths of two people. They also note his "controversial" reputation, but state that he was met with a warm reception by the students who were in attendance of the event.[35] Included in the caption is a detail from Ed Ellington's

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[32] Clip from Memphis Press-Scimitar, 19 March 1966. Box 19, Folder 2, George Street Collection, University of Mississippi Archives and Special Collections, University, Mississippi.
[33] *The Mississippian*, March 22, 1966, 1.
[34] Of which Kennedy clearly had a massive role.
[35] *The Mississippian*, March 22, 1966, 1.

introduction speech, where he wished that, by inviting Kennedy to speak on campus, the words “closed society” would never again be used to describe Mississippi.[36]

The paper includes several news articles written by various students or reprinted from various sources, as well as pictorial accounts of Kennedy’s visit. Most interesting among these is an article reprinted from the *Memphis Commercial* appeal which includes several cartoons about Bobby Kennedy as well as some analysis of the event.

In “RFK at Ole Miss,” an unnamed author recounts the event and comments on the “golden political opportunity” that the controversial speech was for Kennedy. By having the opportunity to speak to an irregular audience for him, Kennedy was able to associate problems that Mississippians “[know] so well” with problems that the rest of the country face, in an attempt to unify a country still divided upon racial lines.[37] The author notes that this “revelation” for Kennedy shows that he has ultimately learned from his previous experiences in the state, but also alleges that his comments were made more for “[Kennedy’s] eastern cinstituents [sic]” than Mississippians, as his speech was broadcast nationwide.[38]

The anonymous article also points out that while (white) Mississippians may not have been particularly fond of Kennedy or his “polar opposite” beliefs, they were seemingly respectful of what he had to say and exemplified “good manners” to their guest. Mississippi’s governor at the time publicly commented that he diametrically opposed Kennedy, but “as

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[36] *The Mississippian*, March 22, 1966, 1.
[37] "RFK at Ole Miss," Reprinted from the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* for *The Mississippian*, March 22, 1966.
[38] "RFK at Ole Miss," Reprinted from the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* for *The Mississippian*, March 22, 1966.

Governor he would defend the right of any citizen to speak in Mississippi."[39] This is ironic, as just a few years later, Mississippi would decide to screen all potential speakers for the state's college campuses before deciding whether or not they were acceptable for students to hear.

Former Governor Ross Barnett, who notoriously led the fight for segregation and against Kennedy, was also quoted in an article about Kennedy's visit titled "Former Governor Barnett charges Kennedy 'twisted statements, misrepresented facts.'" This article was written in response to Kennedy's assertion that while no "one person" was responsible for the riots that broke out following the integration, there was definitely a partnership between Kennedy and Barnett to try and minimize any risks of the situation.[40] By mentioning this partnership, Kennedy knowingly implicated Barnett as someone willing to work with the Kennedy administration. By doing so, Kennedy implied that Barnett had lied to the state population about his involvement and supposed resistance. Furthermore, Kennedy described how many of the decisions about the enrollment were made by Barnett, not the Kennedy brothers, and that the idea of inviting federal marshals to campus was Barnett's idea as he was sure that Meredith would require protection from the wrath of Mississippians.[41]

Kennedy's comments had contradicted many of the statements Barnett had publicly made in relation to the integration. If Kennedy had been unpopular before, his implication of Barnett as compromiser and a partner likely conflicted many segregationist Mississippians.

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[39] "RFK at Ole Miss," Reprinted from the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* for *The Mississippian*, March 22, 1966.
[40] "Former Governor Barnett charges Kennedy 'twisted statements, misrepresented facts.'" *The Mississippian*, March 22, 1966.
[41] "Former Governor Barnett charges Kennedy 'twisted statements, misrepresented facts.'" *The Mississippian*, March 22, 1966.

According to Kennedy, it was Barnett who insisted on a large number of federal marshals that should do what was necessary to "keep law and order."[42] Kennedy exposed the whole situation as being delicately crafted to get the job done.

Of course, this knowledge looked with disfavor upon hardliner Ross Barnett. Barnett was forced to cover his tracks, claiming that Kennedy had "twisted… and misrepresented the facts."[43] He also claimed that his visit to the campus looked unfavorably on Kennedy as someone who wasted government money on protecting "one unqualified student" enrolling on campus, especially considering the riot resulting. Barnett completely denies the claims Kennedy made during his speech on campus, but also openly questions why Kennedy didn't tell the full truth of his own role in the situation, including how he had tried several different times to enroll Meredith – all of which Barnett was able to strike down – or how he threatened the use of the entire military against the university should they not comply.[44]

Barnett then decided to use the age-old scheme of discrediting his enemy, by accusing both Kennedy brothers as being sympathetic with communists. In the words of Barnett, Bobby Kennedy was "a very sick and dangerous American" who "recklessly distorts the facts" and "puts politics ahead of principles" in order to clear his path to becoming "a candidate for President."[45]

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[42] "Former Governor Barnett charges Kennedy 'twisted statements, misrepresented facts.'" *The Mississippian*, March 22, 1966.
[43] "Former Governor Barnett charges Kennedy 'twisted statements, misrepresented facts.'" *The Mississippian*, March 22, 1966.
[44] "Former Governor Barnett charges Kennedy 'twisted statements, misrepresented facts.'" *The Mississippian*, March 22, 1966.
[45] "Former Governor Barnett charges Kennedy 'twisted statements, misrepresented facts.'" *The Mississippian*, March 22, 1966.

Following Kennedy's speech, one unintended consequence did occur. Because of Williams' relaxation of the Speaker Ban law, the Mississippi Board of Trustees decided to strengthen the already-existing legislation. The Board of Trustees wanted to prevent another embarrassment of the state's conservative institution from occurring in the name of free speech. They chose to crack down on the vetting process of future speakers.

CHAPTER II: PREVENTING VIOLENCE TO THE ACADEMIC ATMOSPHERE

To understand the effect that the Kennedy speech had on Mississippi's Speaker Ban requires a longer view, starting a decade before his visit. Following the Brown vs. Board of Education decision in May of 1954, the Mississippi government was in turmoil over how to react to segregation. Dr. Charles W. Eagles described this period in history as the "closing" of Mississippi society, playing on the infamous phrase James W. Silver pioneered following the integration of the University of Mississippi. It was in the few months following the Brown decision that Mississippi's segregation laws strengthened - public schools at risk of integration closed, segregationists created the White Citizens' Council, and any attempts to combat segregation laws in the state were banned.[46] What's more, any effort to speak out against these measures was also legally prohibited.

The mid-1950s saw Mississippi's political class take action to ensure that speech would be vetted rather than "free." Shortly after the Mississippi government strengthened segregation laws, it chose to limit freedom of speech against accepted policies as well. An incident at Mississippi Southern University regarding a controversial and pacifist speaker caused the entire state to be put on high alert. In the context of the Cold War, advocating for peace was conflated with support for communists. Following this incident, the Mississippi Board of Trustees, a governor-appointed group now known as the Institutions of Higher Learning Board, instituted a statewide Speaker Ban. This ban would require any potential speaker at any Mississippi campus to be vetted by both a university-sanctioned committee

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[46] Charles W. Eagles, "The Closing of Mississippi Society: Will Campbell, "The $64,000 Question," and Religious Emphasis Week at the University of Mississippi," *The Journal of Southern History* 67, no. 2 (May 2001): 331-332, doi:10.2307/3069868.

and the Board of Trustees before being allowed to speak on campus.[47] While a significant amount of the reasoning behind this law was to prevent any integrationist thinkers to put forth their ideas before students, the Board also made a point to refuse anyone associated with communist ideologies. An unnamed source attributed this association with communism and the Black Freedom Struggle to Mississippi political powerhouse James O. Eastland. The unnamed source was quoted as saying, "Eastland saw a Red behind every black."[48]

The first major exercise of this law would occur on the University of Mississippi's campus. In the spring of 1956, Director of Religious Life Will D. Campbell organized Religious Emphasis Week, which, unbeknownst to university officials, would be "sympathetic to racial justice." Though not entirely centered around race, Campbell wanted the issue of segregation to be a point of discussion between students and speakers.[49] Several of the speakers he had invited were avid proponents of religion being the driving force behind integration. One of the speakers, G. McLeod Bryan, was a Baptist minister, and his entire convocation speech was aimed at using Christianity as an "agent for change" in that religion should be reason alone for easing racial tensions.[50]

Surprisingly, the speech was received well by the university community. Chancellor J.D. Williams sent a note to Campbell about how much he enjoyed the speech and wished only for more people to hear it.[51] Despite this warm reception, it had also become known that Campbell and Bryan had visited Providence Farm, a central site to the rural civil rights

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[47] Eagles, "The Closing," 335.
[48] 17 Feb 1955 Minutes, Mississippi's Board of Trustees, Institutions of Higher Learning, as quoted in Eagles' "The Closing of Mississippi Society," 335.
[49] Will D. Campbell, quoted in Eagles' "The Closing of Mississippi Society," 337.
[50] G. McLeod Bryan, as quoted in Eagles' "The Closing of Mississippi Society," 338.
[51] Eagles, "The Closing," 339.

movement in the early 1950s. His being there alone had caused him to become the subject of a White Citizens' Council file, which meant that he was being watched by the council for his actions relating to race relations in the state.

The turmoil culminated in "an uproar" upon the arrival of Campbell's Religious Emphasis Week. Some of the speakers that Campbell had invited were ardent activists in the Black Freedom Struggle, such as Alvin Kershaw, an Episcopal minister who donated frequently to the NAACP and was an active (and outspoken) supporter. Upon the announcement of his invitation to speak on campus, many white conservative Mississippians wrote letters of protest against Kershaw, claiming that the university was anti-segregationist.[52] The outrage was so significant that many worried that the state legislature would cease allocating funds to the university if Kershaw was permitted to speak. Chancellor Williams chose not to comment on the issue, and instead waited for the Board of Trustees to decide a solution.[53] As one Mississippian would state, the university had to decide between "financial support on the one hand and intellectual honesty on the other."[54] In other words, free speech on campus might have to be curtailed when it threatened financial donations that hinged on alumni support.

Meanwhile, university students tended to support Kershaw's right to speak on campus, whether or not they agreed politically. It seems that many students embraced the notion that universities should be spaces for free intellectual exchange, even if that meant controversy and disagreements. *The Mississippian*, the university's student newspaper, was

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[52] Eagles, "The Closing," 341.
[53] Eagles, "The Closing," 342-343.
[54] Eagles, "The Closing," 349.

ardently against censorship of any speaker. The paper's editor openly stated that students were smart enough to form their own opinions of a speech, without any influence on the speaker's part. Nearly three quarters of the student body agreed with him. The student government, following student opinion, organized a coalition that would allow for Kershaw to speak on campus. They submitted this request directly to the Chancellor.[55]

After months and months of back and forth, Chancellor Williams decided to cancel Kershaw's visit. Because of Kershaw's refusal to speak against the NAACP, Williams chose to prohibit his visit, in order to appease the conservative faction of the state. Williams declared that Kershaw's appearance at Religious Emphasis Week might have caused a massive disruption that might have even resulted in "student demonstration."[56] It is here that Williams first limited free speech by uninviting Reverend Kershaw, but also by preventing a "disruption" caused by students, which suggested Williams' opinion on matters of free speech. Not all messages were equally welcomed on campus. Slowly, the rest of the out of state speakers for Religious Emphasis Week withdrew from participating, on the grounds of protesting Williams' censorship.[57]

Mississippi was not alone in creating censorship laws, especially in the South. The North Carolina state legislature also instituted their Speaker Ban policy amidst the strengthening civil rights movement. Under the guise of hyper-patriotic, anti-Communist sentiment, the North Carolina policy prohibited anyone "known to advocate the overthrow of the Constitution of the United States" from being allowed to speak on the university's

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[55] Eagles, "The Closing," 346.
[56] J.D. Williams, quoted in Eagles' "The Closing of Mississippi Society," 357.
[57] Eagles, "The Closing," 363.

campus. While there was no significant Communist threat in the state, many legislators considered Civil Rights protests and other liberal politics equally dangerous and classified any actions as communistic behavior.[58] Mississippi, too, used this tactic of associating Civil Rights protests as Communist demonstrations as part of conservative political rhetoric, a damning connection during the Cold War.

The Speaker Ban continued for the better part of a decade. Coming under fire in November of 1966, the decade-long policy was written to prohibit speakers who "will do violence to the academic atmosphere, or persons in disrepute in the area from whence they come and those persons charged with crimes or other moral wrongs…"[59] The policy left a big interpretation problem--what did it mean to do violence to the academic atmosphere? The wording suggested that those who challenged the status quo were not welcome on the university campus. That said, the head of the university's committee to oversee this process was Dr. Russell H. Barrett, a "Yankee" professor of Political Science who was seemingly liberal, at least concerning issues of civil rights.[60] It was possible that his power on the Committee might lead to more openness than the state's power brokers would have liked.

The late 1960s speaker ban controversies breathed new life into an existing review process for invited speakers, which the university had used for over a decade with little controversy. Starting in 1955, the university administration oversaw the "Forum Committee," a vetting committee for campus speakers. If a student group wanted to invite a certain

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[58] Jeffery A. Turner, *Sitting in and Speaking Out: Student Movements in the American South, 1960-1970* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010), PDF e-book, 144.
[59] "SPEAKER BAN HIT AT MISSISSIPPI U: Suit Is Filed to End Policy Barring N.A.A.C.P. Leader," *New York Times*, July 4, 1966, 29.
[60] Finding aid for the Russell Barrett Collection, The University of Mississippi Archives and Special Collections, Oxford, MS.

speaker, they would need to submit an application to the Forum Committee. The Committee was then responsible for inspecting potential speakers. If the speakers were deemed appropriate by the Committee, the university chancellor would then seek the Mississippi Board of Trustees approval before extending an invitation. The speakers the Committee flagged for closer scrutiny were exclusively left leaning or involved with liberal activism. It was clear that the Forum Committee was charged with upholding conservative values on the campus. Most of the records document that the Forum Committee declined to approve University invitations to major liberal political leaders or leftist thinkers.

The University's vetting plan was strict and procedural. There was a form to be filled out by the Forum Committee that outlined who the potential speaker was and information about them, specifically the sort of information they were likely to discuss and who they were invited to speak to.[61] Each form was printed with the reminder that three copies were to be made of each form: one for campus groups inviting the speakers, one for the Board of Trustees, and one for the university chancellor. Though the university under the administrations of both Chancellor J.D. Williams and Porter L. Fortune was run with such procedure, the archival record reveals most about the involvement of the Board of Trustees in deciding what students were to be influenced by.

One of the first documented examples of this process is a review of the university's Mortar Board and Omicron Delta Kappa chapter's invitation of Dr. Merle Fainsod. The form

[61] In many cases, it was the university's Young Democrats that invited liberal thinkers. Though they knew they were likely going to be unsuccessful in securing an invitation, it was a subtle form of protest against campus control of free speech.

lists Dr. Fainsod as a Professor of Political Science at Harvard University,[62] but fails to mention that Fainsod was a "leading scholar of Soviet studies." In 1952, Fainsod had published an acclaimed book, *How Russia is Ruled,* which argued that Stalin's influence and style of government would continue indefinitely in the Soviet Union.[63] The Committee described the meeting as a "public lecture on challenge of Communism." With the form is a note attached that suggests there was an additional confidential report to follow the form, but that the "accuracy" of said form was questionable. The form was kept in the records of Chancellor Williams' administration, but it is unclear whether or not Fainsod was ever approved.

Soon after the Committee met to discuss Fainsod, a potential new speaker was added to the list; his name was Paul H. Douglas. Douglas was a renowned senator from Illinois who was extremely against segregation and had become a significant figure in the liberal coalition. Douglas had taken it upon himself, following his election in 1949, "to get civil rights legislation through a Senate which, for seventy years before he came, buried anything to do with civil rights."[64] For someone of Douglas' beliefs to be invited to the pre-desegregation University of Mississippi in 1961 would be a major shock to the state's leading conservatives. Because of this, a small note attached to the form simply states that "[two

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[62] Speaker form regarding Dr. Merle Fainsod, Speaker Ban Law, Box 1, Folder 1. Archives and Special Collections, University of Mississippi. Oxford, MS.
[63] "Dr. Merle Fainsod of Harvard, Leading Soviet Scholar, 64, Dies," *The New York Times*, February 12, 1972, 32.
[64] John Keohane, *Biography of Paul H. Douglas by John Keohane*, (Bowdoin College, 2003).

members of the Committee] agreed it would be inexpedient to have Senator Douglas as a speaker at this time."[65]

Though the predominant issues with potential speakers usually concerned racial relations, nearly every liberal scholar was flagged for review. In 1962, the university's pre-medical society, Alpha Epsilon Delta, invited Mississippi Labor Council member Claude E. Ramsey to debate Dr. George Twente of the university's medical school over the topic of "medical care for the aged."[66] The Committee's notes on this case detect an issue with controversial debates rather than an issue with the speaker himself, yet the speaker was still flagged for review. The university decided against the debate, likely because a mere controversial debate would look further poorly on the school during its integration crisis.

The university continued to use this vetting process for the next few years. Students would consider a list of speakers, the Committee would vet any of their concerns, and then send it on to the chancellor for approval. This system was considered sufficient enough, as the university administration was responsible for deciding what kind of ideologies would be exposed to. Students were seemingly aware of this administration-level censorship, but even if they had been keeping tabs, they were largely powerless to protest it. Some students carried out minor protests - the college's Young Democrats often submitted potential speakers for approval, knowing that they were subject to review and likely not approved. However, the Speaker Ban still proved insurmountable and received little student attention.

[65] Form regarding Paul H. Douglas, Speaker Ban Law, Box 1, Folder 1, The University of Mississippi Archives and Special Collections, Oxford, MS.
[66] Form regarding Claude E. Ramsey, Speaker Ban Law, Box 1, Folder 1, The University of Mississippi Archives and Special Collections, Oxford, MS.

In 1966, however, a pair of students decided to invite Senator Robert F. Kennedy to the university campus, as they had heard rumors of Kennedy's involvement with the university's integration and wanted his side of the story - especially as it incriminated Ross Barnett, a notorious segregationist, as being cooperative with the Kennedy administration.[67] Barnett had been admired by Mississippi conservatives for his segregationist stance and his supposed attempt to stand up to the Kennedy administration's forced integration of the university. However, the rumor was that Barnett had not been so diametrically opposed to Kennedy throughout the process - and had indeed worked with him to secure James Meredith's safe enrollment instead.

Cleveland Donald and Gerald Blessey trusted these rumors, and they believed that exposing this truth might ruin Barnett's chance for reelection. Donald and Blessey were well-known liberals at the university and were concerned about getting around the Speaker Ban.[68] Their solution was to create a Law School Speaker's Bureau, described in chapter one, and invite Kennedy through it. As they saw it, there was less chance that the university chancellor would oppose it than if they had sent an invitation through a well-known liberal group on campus. Their solution was to submit a long list of names for review in hopes that they would all be approved at once. The university administration had not been aware that Kennedy was aware of this plan,[69] and assumed he would never return to Mississippi following his role in the integration and approved it seamlessly. Following the incident

[67] Mary Blessey, "Truth Marching On: Robert F. Kennedy at the University of Mississippi," (master's thesis, The University of Mississippi, 2019), 10.
[68] Mary Blessey, "Truth Marching On: Robert F. Kennedy at the University of Mississippi," (master's thesis, The University of Mississippi, 2019), 12-13.
[69] Mary Blessey, "Truth Marching On: Robert F. Kennedy at the University of Mississippi," (master's thesis, The University of Mississippi, 2019), 13.

described in chapter one, the Mississippi Board of Trustees decided to further cement their involvement in determining which ideas the university was exposing their students to. A statewide Speaker Ban was set in place to prevent anything like Kennedy's visit from happening again.

In 1967, following the controversy of Robert F. Kennedy's speech the year before, the Young Democrats once again made an ambitiously bold move in inviting Martin Luther King, Jr. to speak on campus. Because of King's notoriety amongst the state's conservatives, the administration chose to do an in-depth search into King's life. The forum committee was issued a thirteen-page report on everything from King's educational background to his involvement in various civil rights organizations.

The report was intended to clarify the rumors that had circulated around King.[70] Public sentiment had associated King with communist activity due to his involvement with the Highlander Folk School, a training ground for civil rights and social justice activists in the late 1950s. The report also clarifies that many of the so-called "communist organizations" he was accused of belonging to were not actually communist fronts. King merely belonged to organizations dedicated to integration, though some of these were found by state courts to be sympathetic to communist teachings.[71] Though in an interview in March of 1956, King had publicly renounced communism,[72] it was clear that this was a concern amongst university officials. Communism had long since been closely associated with the civil rights movement.

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[70] "Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.," Speaker Ban Law, Box 1, Folder 4. Archives and Special Collections, University of Mississippi. Oxford, MS.
[71] "Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.," Speaker Ban Law, Box 1, Folder 4, 2. Archives and Special Collections, University of Mississippi. Oxford, MS.
[72] "Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.," Speaker Ban Law, Box 1, Folder 4, 4. Archives and Special Collections, University of Mississippi. Oxford, MS.

Political rhetoric had associated steps towards racial equality as being inherently radical.[73] King had been amongst a group that had called for the defeat of several bills sponsored by Dixiecrats that would essentially halt integration, as was reported by major labor magazine "The Worker."[74] This likely significantly angered Mississippi conservatives, and association with King would look bad upon the university.

If his association with the Communist Party was not enough, King was adamantly against the Vietnam War. In 1965, King first began speaking against the war and American hegemony. He wrote newspaper articles about the dangers of war in the nuclear age and that peaceful negotiations were always better than violent battles. In King's eyes, diplomacy was the key to winning the war against communism and Vietnam. However, these peaceful sentiments reverberated through the Communist Party in America, who upheld his message, once again tying him to the party. The report closes by acknowledging his work in Leftist magazines, winning the Nobel Peace Prize, and his supposed incitement of a riot in Chicago.[75]

Attached at the very end of the document is a short paragraph that was labeled "confidential." Following is a one-paragraph brief that reports a hotel stay by King and his associates. During the stay, there was reportedly a party hosted by King which involved a group of several women.[76] The report seems to accuse King of involving himself in an extra-

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[73] Eagles, "The Closing," 335.
[74] "Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.," Speaker Ban Law, Box 1, Folder 4, 5. Archives and Special Collections, University of Mississippi. Oxford, MS.
[75] "Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.," Speaker Ban Law, Box 1, Folder 4, 11-12. Archives and Special Collections, University of Mississippi. Oxford, MS.
[76] "Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.," Speaker Ban Law, Box 1, Folder 4. Archives and Special Collections, University of Mississippi. Oxford, MS.

marital affair while traveling for work, alleging that the women only seemingly visited during evening hours. The source is unnamed, and the document is undated, so it is unclear how university officials might have gained access to this document. However, Mississippi senator and active alumni James O. Eastland was the sitting chairman of the Judiciary Committee at the time, likely having access to information regarding King and his activities.

The vetting committee would eventually come to the ruling that King would not be offered an invitation to visit campus. Whether this was because of his blatant anti-Vietnam War sentiment, his involvement in the Black Freedom Struggle, or his “improper morals” documented in the secret report, it is uncertain. What is certain is that the University of Mississippi chose not to invite a prominent civil rights activist to campus, thus further endangering the use of free speech on campus and preventing liberal ideas of racial equality and social justice from influencing student opinion.

CHAPTER III: CARRYING THE COFFIN

The question of student freedom on campus was not yet answered in 1968. Throughout the country, students at various schools began protesting the establishment and administration at several major schools and for various reasons. Activism, especially in the name of black equality, was a particularly strong force on many campuses - even on those outside of the South. Many black students felt that, beyond years of struggling against white supremacy in the nationwide Black Freedom Struggle, that racism still existed and ran rampantly throughout academia. At the same time, many Black students felt the momentum of past organizing victories. They felt particularly motivated and a sense of power upon organizing. Because of this "strength in numbers" approach, many Black Student Unions and other similar organizations popped up on the nation's leading university campuses.[77]

These groups, no matter how dedicated the member or how strong the organization, faced significant challenges: in many cases, this meant challenging the status quo and administrative power of a historically white institution. With that in mind, students organized around a series of questions: "who is college for?" and "who are going to be the movers and shakers of a post-segregationist society?" and "what is going to be taught and who should teach it?"[78]

Black student organizations nationwide challenged university structures and practices to adapt to a post-segregationist society. They uprooted the systems of historical colleges by challenging the idea of "elite education" and reminded public universities of their core

[77] Martha Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), 1.
[78] Biondi, *The Black Revolution,* 1.

mission: to educate the masses.[79] No longer were colleges intended to benefit a chosen few, or a chosen race, but were now intended to educate - and in some cases, mobilize - everyone who sought it. Black student organizing was gaining steam on a campus-by-campus basis throughout the nation.

At the University of Mississippi, however, the Black Student Union (BSU) took root in the context of ongoing struggles over civil rights and free speech on campus. Just six years before, James Meredith had successfully broken the color barrier at the university, but not without intense and, in some cases, lethal backlash. In November of 1968, the first semblance of the University of Mississippi's Black Student Union was chartered. Six years following the official integration of the university, the black population totaled somewhere around a meager 2%.[80] And though the campus was technically desegregated, the campus environment was still primarily geared towards white students. Furthermore, black students felt unwelcomed by both their peers and the campus faculty. Despite their admittance to the university, these students were effectively closed off from campus life. As a means of advancing meaningful inclusion on campus, several black students organized a campus club that would work towards making their campus community a better place for students of all races - this club was dubbed the Black Student Union.

The University of Mississippi was considered by contemporary Mississippians to be on the same level as the Ivy League school, so it's no wonder that black students were willing to attend a school so deeply entrenched in Confederate symbolism and imagery in

[79] Biondi, *The Black Revolution*, 2.
[80] Garrett Felber, Remarks at "Black Power at Ole Miss" event, February 24, 2020, Fulton Chapel, the University of Mississippi.

order to receive a first-class education. But when these students first stepped foot on campus, they soon realized just how deep white supremacy ran within the university's traditions and campus sentiment at large. As a founding member of the Black Student Union, Kenneth Mayfield, remembered it,

> Upon entering this institution, I found that I was confronted with the most unusual problems... I found that the students, the student body, you know, was racist. I mean I found that out by such actions that they took upon my entrance. Then, some of my instructors, not all of them, but some of them, I found that they were racists. Upon being confronted by the administration I found that the administration was racist.[81]

The formation of the Black Student Union was a strategy to give a voice to the black students on the University of Mississippi campus.

The Black Student Union was, from its very formation, a group intended to disrupt the status quo at the University of Mississippi. Though their main mission was to give a voice to black students, it was also in their mission to protest all forms of injustice. Yet in the eyes of the administration, this mission, and those who worked toward it, were deemed radical. Accordingly, the group's right to free speech on campus would be limited. Its opponents relied on a similar rationale used in the era of the Speaker Ban--those who challenged the status quo threatened to disrupt the peace, and thus should not have a platform for fear that the campus might witness 1962-style violence once again. The responsibility to keep the peace was placed on the shoulders of black students advocating for equality, rather than on whites who might use violence to defend the status quo. Indeed, soon after the BSU's

[81] Transcript of the hearing by Chancellor Fortune, Sovereignty Commission Files, The Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 5.

formation, a Federal Bureau of Investigation file was opened on the group, with the intent to surveille the group as means of suppressing radicalism among the black students of the University of Mississippi. Along with the opening of the file, the FBI also looked into depositing informants into the group in order to better process the group's ideas and potential actions. These early signs foreshadowed the lengths the University, working with law enforcement, would go to in order to limit the power of the BSU.

The very existence of a Black Student Union caused alarm on the part of the university's administration. The first attempts in establishing the group in November of 1968 were unsuccessful, as the university claimed that their paperwork was insufficient. The university required the group to publish a constitution and also made it explicitly clear that the BSU could not prevent white members from joining, as the fraternities on campus had all gone to great pains to remove the clauses from their individual constitutions that prevented black students from joining.[82] On March 28, 1969, the BSU agreed to these terms; no one could be barred from joining on the basis of race, nor could anyone from outside of the campus community be considered a member. The university police chief, Burns Tatum, likened the group's operations to that of a social fraternity.[83] In Tatum's eyes, the BSU served as a communal place for black students to engage with each other. For the students, the BSU served as a means of organizing for social justice.

From its early and modest beginnings, the Black Student Union quickly found strength in organizing. Tired of being looked over by the university faculty and

[82] Memorandum for the United States Government regarding the Black Student Union at the University of Mississippi, Federal Bureau of Investigation file, 20 Feb 1969, 2.
[83] Memorandum from SA Robin O. Cotten regarding the Black Student Union, Federal Bureau of Investigation file, 18 April 1969.

administration, the BSU formed as means of both socializing with one another but also for getting to the tasks at hand: fully desegregating a university that considered itself a shrine to the Lost Cause and creating meaningful inclusion for black students on campus.

The BSU soon used direct action as a strategy to advance their mission on campus. The first instance of student protest was recorded on January 10, 1969, when a group of BSU students attended a university basketball game. At the time, it was customary for the university band to play "Dixie" - the university's "rallying song" and a nod to the glory days of the Confederacy, where the white elite seamlessly profited from the use of enslaved labor while maintaining a glorified racial power structure. In protest of the song's message - and the subliminal reminder to the black students of what "their place" was on campus - the members of the Black Student Union rose up, raising their black-gloved right hands and chanted "black power."[84] In response, a group of flustered white students wrapped white handkerchiefs around their hands and yelled "white power." The campus police chief who documented this event argued that the white students did so in a joking manner, and that "no incidents" occurred.[85] Despite this perception, it made a clear statement to the Black Student Union: "you don't stand a chance protesting; you don't belong here."

All the while, the Federal Bureau of Investigation had been surveilling members of the group for their alleged involvement, a treatment that other "social fraternities" did not receive. Standard protocol for the Bureau was to only begin surveillance on those who had previously been active with radical groups or to those making contact with outside radical

[84] Memorandum for the United States Government regarding the Black Student Union at the University of Mississippi, Federal Bureau of Investigation file, 20 Feb 1969, 1.
[85] Memorandum for the United States Government regarding the Black Student Union at the University of Mississippi, Federal Bureau of Investigation file, 20 Feb 1969, 1.

groups, unless some sort of destruction had been initiated, such as destruction of property.[86] That said, according to a memorandum from April 18, 1969, it was also protocol for the case to be assigned an informant within a group, as well as a specific agent for the case itself.[87] It is worth noting here that the University of Mississippi's Black Student Union was one of many black activist groups under surveillance at the time. The memorandum includes a printed name for the document to be filed under: "Black Student Groups on College Campuses."[88]

Despite this infiltration, the BSU continued to organize. The basketball game protest was more than powerful political theater--it was a strategy to achieve the BSU's platform. The Black Student Union, upon organization, immediately compiled a list of demands that they wished for the school to carry out, and those demands would drive their organizing. One of these was for Police Chief Tatum to hire a black campus police officer, which he carried out. With the hire made, Tatum reported that the university administration cooperated with the BSU's demands, and so there were "no other problems or incidents" to be reported.[89] From the appearances within this document, Tatum appeared to be catering to both sides; not only was he carrying out the demands of the BSU, but he was also playing the informant to the FBI. Each step the BSU took towards change was being meticulously recorded by the FBI, who was ready to step in at a moment's notice. It is also worth noting that agreeing to

[86] Memorandum regarding UM BSU from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Federal Bureau of Investigation file ,28 Mar 1969, 2.
[87] Memorandum regarding UM BSU from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Federal Bureau of Investigation file, 18 April 1969.
[88] Memorandum regarding UM BSU from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Federal Bureau of Investigation file, 18 April 1969.
[89] Memorandum from SA Robin O. Cotten regarding the Black Student Union, Federal Bureau of Investigation file, 18 April 1969.

hire a new black campus police officer did less to change the university status quo than some of the other BSU demands would have. For instance, there was no guarantee that the new officer would automatically side with black students should they find themselves in a conflict with the campus police.

The rest of the 1968-1969 school year was met with few public conflicts, for both the BSU and the school administration. From the BSU's perspective, the university had taken some steps to respond to their list of demands. From the administration's perspective, the BSU had not taken any active steps towards protesting the university or towards planning any sort of insurrection. In fact, Col. Whitney Stuart, another campus security officer, had reported that he had heard no mention of "any activity" from the BSU in the last few weeks of May 1969.[90] Stuart did add, however, that he was unsuccessful in implementing an informant within the group, but that the newly hired black security officer might be a source with which to gain information.[91]

Very little happened over the summer months before the 1969-1970 school year. According to a July 18 memorandum, no known Black Student Union club activity had occurred over the summer that the campus security was aware of.[92] That said, a member of the Black Student Union, Michael Leonard King, appeared before a subunit of the FBI that was stationed in Greenville, Mississippi, and asked to be considered for a job placement following his graduation from the University of Mississippi. According to the FBI file, King

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[90] Memorandum from SA Cotten regarding the BSU, Federal Bureau of Investigation file, 29 May 1969.
[91] Memorandum from SA Cotten regarding the BSU, Federal Bureau of Investigation file, 29 May 1969.
[92] Memorandum from SA Cotten regarding the BSU, Federal Bureau of Investigation file, 18 July 1969.

was a member of the executive board for the Black Student Union, which would make him a prime candidate for an FBI informant. According to a memorandum regarding the instance, King was considered a viable and clear choice for "liaison" within the group.[93]

On August 12, 1969, the new chief of campus security, Dick Popernick, struck a different tone, approaching the group with more suspicion than his predecessor had the year before. For example, Popernick advised the bureau to keep tabs on the newly initiated campus advisor for the Black Student Union, Reverend Wayne Johnson. Johnson had previously been associated with the Interdenominational Seminary of Atlanta. He would serve as both chaplain and advisor to the group. Popernick noted that Johnson had not been formally hired by the university, but instead had been suggested by a university professor, implying that Johnson had not been vetted by the administration. Popernick concluded this update by stating that the BSU had prompted "unrest" at the UM campus after publishing their demands the previous school year.[94] Casting the BSU as troublemakers directly contradicted statements previously made by campus security officials who said there was "no activity" to worry about. This changing in tone suggests that Popernick believed he was handling "radical student groups."

Chief Popernick kept a close eye on the group and its meetings. Popernick appeared to have no reservations about spying on the group of students he swore an oath to protect. Popernick seemed to be in regular conversation with the FBI headquarters in the state, making frequent reports on the activities of the university's black students. For example, he

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[93] Jackson letter to "Bureau" regarding "racial informants," Federal Bureau of Investigation file, 13 June 1969, 2.
[94] Statement by Chief Popernick, via "SAC Jackson," regarding the BSU, Federal Bureau of Investigation file, 12 Aug 1969.

reported the first meeting of the BSU in the 1969-1970 school year was on September 29th and was hosted by the group's new president, Brian G. Nichols, in Meek Hall. Included in this report was a prediction by Popernick that "all [black students] attending the Univ. of Miss. will become associated with the BSU."[95]

While the 1968-1969 school year had been rather quiet for the BSU, the group changed tactics during the fall 1969 semester. The first demonstration associated with the group took place on October 15th, 1969. The BSU participated in a silent march through the university's YMCA in honor of Moratorium Day, which was a nationwide protest against the war in Vietnam. Though "no incidents" were reported, Popernick continued to update the growing FBI file on club activities. Though a separate Moratorium service had occurred around the same time that day, the BSU's march was considered a "separate demonstration."[96] According to a report made by agent Robin O. Cotten, the BSU students carried a coffin to symbolize the many unnecessary deaths that would result from the unnecessary war.[97]

For nearly a month after, Chief Popernick offered no new reports as to the BSU's doings, until a special report from December 3rd, 1969, in which Popernick noted that the BSU had demanded a hearing with university chancellor Porter L. Fortune to discuss a series of demands from the group. One of those demands included the hiring of a black law professor by the name of Franklin D. Cleckley. Popernick noted that Cleckley has a

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[95] Memorandum to "SAC" on behalf of Richard Popernick, Federal Bureau of Investigation file, 29 Sept 1969.
[96] Memorandum from SA John Dennis Miller on behalf of Richard Popernick concerning Vietnam Moratorium, Federal Bureau of Investigation file, 20 Oct 1969.
[97] Memorandum from SA Robin O. Cotten concerning the Black Student Union, Federal Bureau of Investigation file, 28 Nov 1969.

reputation as a "troublemaker," who has "represented deserters and selective service violators."[98] But that call for a hearing seemed the only noteworthy activity for months. At the beginning of the following semester, Chief Popernick once again reported radio silence from the group as late as January 20, 1970. Agent Cotten wrote that Popernick had "heard nothing from aany [sic] member of the Black Student Union in the way of protests since he was last contacted" in early December regarding the series of demands that the BSU members had made to Chancellor Fortune.[99]

However, in late February of 1970, the BSU once again organized a protest at the university's Student Union. Tired of being ignored by university administration and their fellow students, the BSU planned a protest in order to remind their administrators and white peers that they were students too. The protest involved around thirty members of the BSU. One member carried in a record player while the others organized the tables into a group. An anonymous member began to play an "obscene" record by Eldridge Cleaver for the next hour and a half. The group then burned a Confederate flag before leaving the university's cafeteria. Chief Popernick noticed that the group seemed to grow into about a hundred in size, though he noted that not all of the protestors were students.[100] Following the protestors' exit from the cafeteria, they marched toward the campus' security office, where BSU students filed 47 complaints to the university police force against Popernick and Chancellor Fortune, whom they called "racist pigs" amongst other "obscene language." According to

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[98] Memorandum from SAC Jackson to SAC Pittsburgh regarding Franklin D. Cleckley, Federal Bureau of Investigation file, 3 Dec 1969.
[99] Memorandum from SA Robin O. Cotten to "SAC" regarding the BSU, Federal Bureau of Investigation file, 23 Jan 1969 [sic].
[100] "Disturbance at the University of Mississippi, Oxford, Mississippi," Federal Bureau of Investigation file, 3 Mar 1970, 1.

Popernick's report, the students claimed they were "going to kill some pigs and burn the racist place down."[101] The protestors then marched to Fortune's office, where they called the chancellor a racist. They then continued their march through campus, stopping briefly at a campus lecture ironically titled "What Rights Do Citizens Really Have?" given by Popernick, a U.S. Army officer, and a black civil rights attorney. While there, the protesting group allegedly targeted the officer and threatened to "cause chaos" like that which had broken out at Mississippi Valley State College that same semester.[102]

The following day, with the Student Union protesting on his mind, Popernick enlisted the help of thirty units of the Mississippi State Highway Patrol to remain on standby. Those law enforcement officers were given the clearance to engage in mass arrests should the opportunity arise, by the members of the Mississippi state Board of Trustees. The campus allegedly remained quiet for most of the day, until a group of about 50 BSU members arrived at the campus security offices, demanding to know whether or not their needs would be met.[103] The office claimed to have forwarded the complaints to Chancellor Fortune's office without any further knowledge regarding what were to come of these demands.[104]

From there, the group of BSU students marched to the university's Fulton Chapel, where renowned singing group Up With People cast were due to perform.[105] Up With People was an integrated and inclusive group dedicated to fostering multicultural engagement. Their message tended to revolve around equality in a desegregating world. There was a significant

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[101] Ibid., 2.
[102] Ibid., 3.
[103] Ibid., 3.
[104] Ibid., 4.
[105] Ibid., 4.

turn out to the event, with many white students in attendance. White students' enthusiasm for the racially progressive Up With People contradicted the lack of solidarity that the BSU had felt on campus, with little explicit support given to their efforts to dismantle white supremacy so far.

Midway through the performance, a group of about 61 members of the BSU marched in a single-file line through the audience and onto the stage with the Up With People cast, where they mingled with the performers before giving the Black Power salute. The BSU students remained on stage for about two songs, before departing Fulton Chapel. Outside, they were met immediately by the Mississippi State Highway Patrolmen that had been on standby for the day. All 61 students involved in the protest were arrested for "disturbing the peace" and were transported to the Lafayette County jail for processing.[106] The language of disturbing the peace is telling. As the previous chapters showed, university officials, as well as some white students and alumni, had repeatedly made the argument that speech which threatened the status quo was speech that incited violence on campus. This limit on free speech was an often-heard rationale in the years after the white riot in response to Meredith's enrollment.

The BSU concertgoers were not the only students criminalized for being black. That night, several more members of the BSU were arrested for standing on the porch of Fortune's home yelling "we want freedom."[107] Another group of 18 were arrested for remaining inside the university's YMCA building after being asked to leave.[108] Popernick claimed not to know

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[106] Ibid., 4.
[107] Ibid., 4.
[108] Ibid., 5.

what group was responsible for the demonstrations that took place on February 25th, yet proceeded to arrest the known members of the university's BSU.[109]

Following their arrests, members of the BSU were either kept in the county jail or transported to north Mississippi's infamous Parchman Farm,[110] a glorified plantation which thrived off the stolen labor of the inmates housed there. According to Popernick, the Lafayette County jail did not have the resources to house all those arrested. If indeed the county jail was at capacity, it was precisely because campus police and deputized Highway Patrol officers and chose to arrest every black student that they encountered that night.

The following day, February 26, 1970, Popernick reported that the university's campus was "quiet." Across town, the county jail set their individual bonds at $50 each. Roughly thirty students were able to post bail that afternoon, while the rest continued to work through the process of securing bail. The forty students housed at Parchman hadn't yet received word on when their bonds would be posted.[111] On February 27th, every remaining student that had been arrested had posted bond and were released from jail.[112] They were told that several days later, on March 3rd, all students arrested would be made to stand in front of the Student Judiciary Council for violating student conduct rules. On the night of the 27th, several members of the BSU were once again seen giving out their list of demands to black students who had not yet become involved with the group.[113]

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[109] Ibid., 5.
[110] The group of students transported there were mostly women, which is interesting, as Parchman is now exclusively for incarcerated males.
[111] "Disturbance at the University of Mississippi, Oxford, Mississippi," Federal Bureau of Investigation file, 3 Mar 1970, 6.
[112] Ibid., 7.
[113] Ibid., 7.

The hearing set forth by the all-white Student Judiciary Council would only be carried out to assist Chancellor Fortune in his decision about the matter. In connection with the initial protest during the Fulton Chapel event, Popernick was able to receive "thirty white students" who gave their first-hand testimonies.[114] Given the campus climate, it was likely that their testimony would be biased against the black students.

In a transcript of the hearing presided over by Chancellor Fortune, many of the students expressed the same concerns repeatedly - concerns they had frequently brought up with both the faculty and administration, with little promise of a solution. Kenneth Mayfield, an active member of the BSU as well as one of the members who joined the Up With People group on stage, recounted his experience with university academics being racist against him, as well as his fellow student body members.[115] He also mentioned the lack of fairness in the trials he had been subject to thus far, on account of his race.[116] When asked to speak, fellow BSU member Henrieese Roberts accused Chancellor Fortune of not doing "everything in [his] capacity to make life a little easier for black people, and [she's] sure [he] won't now."[117]

The students also clarified that they did not mean to start a disturbance; they never used violence. As they saw it, they were instead exercising their right to free speech. Mayfield, for instance, joined the group on stage to "dramatize the situation… at Ole Miss."[118] According to a testimony given by Rutha Lee Smith, the Up With People protest

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[114] Ibid., 20.
[115] Transcript of the hearing by Chancellor Fortune, Sovereignty Commission Files, The Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 4.
[116] Ibid., 7.
[117] Ibid., 18.
[118] Transcript of the hearing by Chancellor Fortune, Sovereignty Commission Files, The Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 4.

was a minor civil protest and many students in attendance did not consider it a disruption. There was absolutely no violence during the protest.[119] In fact, many in attendance thought the protest itself to be part of the program, as the Up With People event itself consisted of a multiracial cast who delivered messages in support of acceptance and social justice. The march was peaceful, according to Smith, and no one tried to stop the group's protest. In fact, the Up With People cast later claimed to have invited the BSU up on stage to sing with them, though the administration later overlooked this detail.[120] Many of the protesters failed to see what they had done wrong.

Kenneth Mayfield summed up the situation best in his closing remarks:

> One thing we fail [sic] to look at... was what prompted the action... They didn't look at whatsoever, you know, what, why we do it. I asked a guy the other day, I say, ah, what do you think about the so-called disruption that took place in Fulton Chapel… He said I wasn't there, but I heard a few comments on it. He said they know they were bias with the whites more or less and, ah, he said when I look at what prompted it, you know, you black students have been using the proper so- called channels to try and achieve the goals here, and he say 'I know it has failed' and he say, 'so you took the so-called necessary action, at least you thought it was necessary to achieve your goal.' Well, the Judicial Council didn't look at that whatsoever.[121]

[119] Ibid., 7.
[120] Ibid., 9.
[121] Ibid, 6.

The university failed to see the issue at large, just as they had for quite some time. The students were not planning on causing trouble or disturbing peace; they simply wanted their voices to be heard by university administration. Students outside the group were able to acknowledge how they had attempted to follow the rules and carry out procedures “the right way” and through “the proper channels,” and yet, they were still ignored by the administration. They were being silenced - denied a platform - just as the classes of students before them had been.

Eight members of the Black Student Union that were involved in the protests and subsequently arrested were later expelled by the Chancellor for their involvement in leading the protest. This group would become known as the “Ole Miss 8.”

CONCLUSION

The issue of freedom of speech at the University of Mississippi campus has been a problem, arguably, since the school's inception. The school was founded for many reasons, but one of the main points was in perpetuating a singular ideal: white supremacy. It was founded because other schools were "failing" to teach that to their students, so the founders of the university decided to start an institution devoted to the message. There is a tension between this origin story and the principle that a university is an institution devoted to the pursuit of knowledge that is forged through intellectual exchange. During the long 1960s, the university often dealt with this tension under the umbrella of free speech, a term that included not only speech promoting black equality but also speech seen as disturbing a fragile peace. It was lost on many students, alumni, and administrators that the "peace" was only enjoyed by the university's white stakeholders in the first place.

In the year 2020, we still have on the University of Mississippi campus several examples of the tension between a university culture rooted in white supremacy, and the idea that the university should be a site of free speech, where meaningful inclusion might happen. Most significant, and indeed most infamous, is the statue of a Confederate Army soldier that recounts the university's contribution to the Lost Cause. It is the first thing a visitor sees when they drive on to campus through the traditional front entrance. It is a massive shrine to the reason the university was founded. Oxford, Mississippi is one of the only - if not *the* only - town that has two Confederate memorials. One standing guard over campus, the other keeping over the county seat's judicial proceedings. These two beacons of white supremacy remain standing, despite significant efforts made by the student body to remove the campus statue and place it somewhere else, which has received massive community support.

Until February 2020, the members of the Ole Miss 8 that were arrested following the Up With People protest and expelled were unable to return to campus to receive the undergraduate degree, despite one of the members literally finishing her final exams and coursework. 50 years following the incident, Linnie Liggins finally received her undergraduate degree from the university's provost, Noel Wilkin. This degree was stolen from her by those uncomfortable with racial equality.

Another reminder of limited speech on the University of Mississippi campus is the existence of the state's "IHL Board." The "IHL Board" is the modern descendant of the institution formerly known as the "Board of Trustees" that was the ultimate power over Mississippi universities throughout the 20th century. The same group that is now the IHL Board were the people responsible for instilling the Speaker Ban in 1955, the same that tried to ban any mention of communism beyond that of hatred for the practice in the 60s, and the entity that allowed for the unjust arrest of university students in the midst of a civil protest.

In today's day and age, the IHL Board continues to be the governing force behind any changes the university makes. They are ultimately responsible for the moving of the infamous Confederate statue. They are ultimately responsible for who is deemed the university's chancellor, which in the most recent case, they chose to be the person in charge of the chancellor search committee. They are a group appointed by the state governor to have a hand in official university business. Though over 50 years have passed since the experiences written about in this thesis, the same power structure remains and the people in charge, those deemed acceptable by Mississippi's infamous "Good Ole Boy" network, still have the ultimate say in shaping the mind of the state's youth.

To many, freedom of speech is a crucial component of academic freedom. A university is intended to be the source of intellectual challenges and exposure to new ideas. However, in the 1960s, academic freedom often meant exposure to liberal ideas of social justice - challenging the status quo, especially through means of expanding racial equality or protesting an unnecessary war abroad that many Americans did not resonate with. In an attempt to halt this shift in American society, the Mississippi government - through the Board of Trustees and the university administration - chose measures that would forgo the principle of free speech, so that the ideas of equality would not be spread to impressionable students and so that the way of life in Mississippi could be preserved: even if that meant sacrificing the academic integrity of its flagship institution.

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