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NO PEACE IN THE VALLEY:  
A DOCUMENTARY FILM ON THE 1970 PROTESTS AT MISSISSIPPI VALLEY STATE  
COLLEGE AND THE LARGEST MASS ARREST OF STUDENTS IN U.S. HISTORY

A Thesis  
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts  
in the Department of Southern Studies  
at The University of Mississippi

KATHERINE E. ABERLE

August 2022



## ABSTRACT

My thesis for the MFA is a documentary film entitled *No Peace in the Valley*, the story of the protests at Mississippi Valley State in February 1970 and the subsequent mass arrest of almost half the student population of the historically black college in Itta Bena, Mississippi. This paper briefly discusses the approach taken in my documentary, an approach that sought to give voice in the telling of the story of the events of 1970 at the historically black college in the Delta of Mississippi to individuals who were there and played an active role as the event unfolded. The film explores the complex motivations that drove students to demonstrate against their college administration and places the events at Mississippi Valley State in the larger context of student protests in 1970 that culminated in the shootings at Jackson State and Kent State.

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family and close friends, who have supported me throughout this process, and the radical

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my committee—Dr. Andy Harper, John Rash, and W. Ralph Eubanks—thank you so much for your support, patience, and constant reassurance. Thank you to Dr. Wes French, the archivist at Mississippi Valley State for being so helpful throughout this process. This project could not have been accomplished without the help of archivists around the state (and beyond).

And of course, the nucleus of this project is the former student activists (and the man who documented them). Thank you so much Mr. Charles Barron, Mr. Eddie Carthan, Dr. Beverly Wade Hogan, Dr. Theophilus King, Ms. Margie Quince, and Mr. Dennis Sells for your activism, your time, and your willingness to share your stories with me (some more than once). And to Mr. Floyd Bailey, I thank you for your time and many visits and your decades of art and historical preservation.

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## 1. Introduction

On May 4, 1970, four students protesting the U.S. invasion of Cambodia and the Vietnam War were shot and killed by soldiers in the National Guard at Kent State University. Upon seeing an iconic photograph published in *Life* of a young woman screaming out over a bloody body at the Ohio campus, Neil Young wrote one of the most iconic protest songs in history. “Ohio” was released only two weeks later because of the urgency of the moment. Sociologist David Karen claims that “what was so important about that song was that it didn’t let the moment die.”<sup>1</sup> Neil Young, along with his bandmates, David Crosby, Stephen Stills, and Graham Nash, wanted the deaths of the students at Kent State to be remembered. In the same week the song was released, two more students were killed by officers on the campus of Jackson State University, a black college in the capital of Mississippi. Unlike in the case of Ohio, there was no summer radio hit about the massacre at Jackson State, in which police fired over two hundred rounds into the women’s dormitory on Lynch Street (where another student had been killed by police almost exactly one year prior to the notorious shooting). While the shooting at Jackson State was a dramatic moment in the era of student unrest, it never had the same recognition and never resided so firmly in the nation’s historic consciousness. And the Jackson State shooting was only the culminating event in a year of student protests in Mississippi in which race played a central part.

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<sup>1</sup> Jon Friedman, “50 Years Ago Neil Young Wrote a Song That Changed a Generation of Protest Music,” *Esquire* (*Esquire*, November 2, 2021), <https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/music/a32981855/neil-young-ohio-meaning-analysis-essay-history-50th-anniversary/>



I've loved the song "Ohio" since I was very young and know that it played a role in my early interest in an age of student unrest during the 1960s and early 1970s that exploded not only in the United States but around the globe. Mississippi colleges did not escape that unrest, and, in fact, fit squarely within the zeitgeist of the era, though in Mississippi it was not just the Vietnam War, but the interplay of race and the new. I knew nothing about the massacre at Jackson State until I got a work-study job in the archives and special collections my freshman year as an undergraduate at the University of Mississippi. There, I found a copy of the "Report on the President's Commission on Campus Unrest." I began reading the transcript and couldn't help but think, "*why have I never heard of this? What else don't I know about that I should absolutely know about?*" Maybe what I should have considered is: why do some things become a part of public memory and others don't?

The subject of my thesis is not about the massacres at Kent State or Jackson State. Students all over the world were protesting on their campuses in 1970 from Paris to Berkeley. The responses from the federal and state governments varied, but students participating in political protest were under attack at their universities and colleges from coast to coast. Only nine weeks prior to the killings at Kent State, the largest mass arrest of students in U.S. history took place at a relatively obscure historically black college in the Mississippi Delta.

If you are not from the Delta or know the background of NFL hall-of-famer Jerry Rice, then you likely have not heard of a small college in the town of Itta Bena, Mississippi. In February 1970, Mississippi Valley State College (now University) had less than 2,500 students. On February 9, almost *half* of them were arrested and brought to one of the most notorious prisons in the country, Parchman Farm, formally known as the Mississippi State Penitentiary. Students were on the fifth day of a campus-wide boycott of classes after the administration failed to meet or implement a list of thirty demands that the students submitted to the Mississippi Valley administration. These demands focused primarily on student-life and ranged from more janitorial staff to allowing women to have

cars on campus, but underlying the specific list of demands was a more general suspicion of authority, a belief in students' ability to have a say in the life of the college and their own educational lives, and a nagging resentment of the inability of those in authority to fulfill the promises of the earlier civil rights movement.<sup>2</sup> Given the racial tensions of the era—just two months earlier on December 4, 1969, Black Panther activist Fred Hampton was shot and killed in a police raid at a Black Panther apartment in Chicago,<sup>3</sup> four days later, the first use of a Special Weapons and Tactics unit, or SWAT team, engaged in a five-hour shootout at the Los Angeles headquarters of the Black Panther Party in which 5000 rounds were exchanged,<sup>4</sup> and at the same time, Governor Ronald Reagan of California very publicly spearheaded the move by the University of California Board of Regents to deny a reappointment of black activist Angela Davis to her position as lecturer in the philosophy department at UCLA.<sup>5</sup> The atmosphere nationally was racially charged.

One of the most striking and peculiar features of the mass arrest at Mississippi Valley State was that the arrests were made by an *ad hoc* police force made up almost entirely of black law enforcement officers. The police force involved in the arrests at Mississippi Valley was made up of nearly sixty black officers drawn from across the state as well as deputized janitorial and cafeteria staff. The school administration, in collusion with Governor John Bell Williams, the Board of Trustees of the Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL)—who are all appointed by the governor of the state— and the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA), part of the Justice Department created under the 1968 Omnibus Crime Bill assembled the all-black arresting force to avoid the

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<sup>2</sup> Information regarding the events at Mississippi Valley State in February can be found in Katherine Aberle, (MA Thesis, University of Mississippi, 2021)

<sup>3</sup> Alicia Maynard, "the Assassination of Fred Hampton," *Digital Chicago* (Lake Forest College, 2019) <https://digitalchicagohistory.org/exhibits/show/fred-hampton-50th/the-assassination>.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Fleischer, "50 Years Ago, LAPD Raided the Black Panthers. SWAT Teams Have Been Targeting Black Communities Ever Since," *Los Angeles Times*, 8 December 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2019-12-08/50-years-swat-black-panthers-militarized-policinglos-angeles>.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Gordon, "The Firing of Angela Davis at UCLA, 1969-1970: Communism, Academic Freedom, and Freedom of Speech," *Society* 57, no. 6 (December 2020).

potentially explosive images of white officers arresting hundreds of black students. The bill, passed by President Lyndon B. Johnson but enacted under Nixon, was designed to assist local law enforcement with quelling public dissent and the mass arrest was a coordinated effort of the various federal, state, and local agencies. Not only were the students arrested, however, but they were also then sent to a prison designed to house those convicted of the most serious criminal offenses.

The federal and state involvement in the organization of a black police force to arrest almost one thousand black students in the Mississippi Delta is enough to make this almost forgotten or ignored story worth telling. Given the concern over public perceptions of the arrests, particularly regarding race, why were the students sent to Parchman? What had these students done to deserve going to *Parchman* and what message was the state sending to its young people? And why, if these agencies put so much preparation and effort into preventing the optics of a Jackson State, did the police killings happen in Mississippi only a few weeks later?

As little as the masses know about the 1970 massacre at Jackson State (and the long history of police brutality there before that), even less is known about the events at Mississippi Valley. I only learned about it after being hired as a member of the Parchman Oral History Project in the summer of 2019. We focused on two mass arrests that took place in 1970, one at Mississippi Valley State College and the other only days after at the University of Mississippi. That year, nearly one thousand students in the state of Mississippi were thrown into Parchman for their activism. I produced a documentary film in 1970 while an MA student in Southern Studies at the University of Mississippi entitled “Black Power at Ole Miss,” that focused on the protests in Oxford, Mississippi. In doing that research and producing that film, I wanted next to tell the story of the protests at Mississippi Valley State. I wrote an MA thesis on the protests entitled “‘Agitate, Agitate, Agitate’: Stories from Mississippi Valley, Parchman, and the Largest Mass Arrest of Students in US History.” For my MFA, I wanted to have the story of the 1970 protests at Mississippi Valley State told in

visual form—as a documentary film.

## 2. Researching the Protests at Mississippi Valley State

To begin initial research, I took what would be many trips to Itta Bena and Mississippi Valley's library. Valley, as the college is informally called, is located in rural Leflore County, less than twenty minutes from Greenwood. When you arrive at the main entrance on campus, there is a small office where a university officer is on duty twenty-four hours a day. The first time I ever went, I explained that I was visiting the library to do some research and a kind woman in a dark green collared shirt (MVSU's colors) asked me if I knew how to get there and then gave me instructions. All the historically black colleges in the state have an officer at the entrance of the campus (both because of the needed security at historically black colleges and because the IHL board requires all universities in the state to have their own campus police department). Though I have now taken at least a dozen trips to Mississippi Valley's campus, it is very clear that I am an outsider, and I try to be respectful of that fact.

Once I arrived at the library, I met the archivist, Dr. Wes French and explained that I was making a film about the mass arrest that took place in 1970. He brought me the sole "STUDENT UNREST" box from the archival stacks. I worked in the archives at the University of Mississippi for three years as an undergraduate, so I've had the special privilege of spending hours a week in a large research institution's archive (and also the annex that houses a full collection of archives that don't fit in the J. D. Williams Library space). Valley's archives are much smaller than the University of Mississippi's, but similar. They both sit on the second floor of the library, and someone greets you at a front desk to help the researcher.

As a researcher, building a relationship with an archivist is vital. Mississippi Valley has significantly less resources than the University of Mississippi and Dr. French runs them by himself. But finding the right materials takes the know-how of an experienced special collections librarian.

I took many pictures with my iPhone that first day studying the variety of materials in the box, which included photographs and a report on the events. It also included a copy of a Sovereignty Commission file titled “LIST OF STUDENTS WHO WOULD JEOPARDIZE THE NORMAL FUNCTIONS OF THE COLLEGE IF RE-ADMITTED BEFORE A HEARING.”<sup>6</sup>

The first person involved with the student unrest at Mississippi Valley that I met with was Mr. Charles Barron, a former coach and superintendent living in Clarksdale, Mississippi. I was introduced to him in Clarksdale at the home of Mrs. Cal Henderson, whom I conducted a number of oral history interviews with a few months prior. I grew very close with Cal and her daughter, Leonette, and knew from our conversations that Cal met her husband at a Mississippi Valley game, where he attended and then went on to coach. I called Mrs. Henderson and asked if she knew of anyone who might have been at Mississippi Valley in 1970 and she called me back only a few minutes later telling me to schedule a time to meet with their close family friend, Coach Barron.

When I met the Coach a few days later, he brought me photographs and documents, and I also showed him some of the photographs I took in the archives the week prior. This was an initial meeting before an on-camera interview a few days later. Then, Coach Barron introduced me to James McBride, who brought me photographs as well, and sat with me for an oral history interview, but declined to do an on-camera interview with me.

From the Sovereignty Commission file, I went down the list and started looking people up online through such sites as “White Pages.” Luckily, a number of people still have landlines and

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<sup>6</sup> *Sovereignty Commission Online Database, Mississippi Department of Archives, SCR ID # 1-123-0-2-1-1-1*, <https://da.mdah.ms.gov/sovcom/result.php?image=images/png/cd02/008939.png&otherstuff=1|123|0|2|1|1|1|8725|>.

listed phone numbers, which is how I contacted Ms. Margie Quince, who had just moved back to Gulfport, Mississippi from Houston, Texas, where she had been living for a number of decades since graduating from college in 1971.

The work I was doing at Mississippi Valley State was also part of the Parchman Oral History Project. The Parchman Oral History Project was made up of two graduate students from the University of Mississippi, Jasmine Stansberry and myself, two undergraduate students from Harvard College, Courtney DeLong and Minahil Khan, and an undergraduate student from Tougaloo College. The student from Tougaloo, Kiara Johnson, got in contact with her college president, Dr. Beverly Wade Hogan, and Mr. Eddie Carthan from Tchula, Mississippi. Jasmine Stansberry found the phone number of Dr. Theophilus King through White Pages, which we were only able to access because one of the team members had purchased a subscription.

I met Dennis Sells the following October at Mississippi Valley's homecoming near his fraternity tent. Walking around with a camera that day brought a good amount of attention, and many people asked me if I was with a local newspaper. I asked various groups if they might know of anyone who was at Valley in 1970 and I was quickly introduced to Dennis Sells. It was from this type of networking that I assembled the interviews for the documentary.

In addition to the interviews and the use of archival material available at the libraries at Mississippi Valley State and Ole Miss, I also had to make trips Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH) in Jackson, Mississippi. The state archives included a treasure trove of materials, particular photographs and video footage preserved from a variety of sources regarding the events of 1970.

### 3. Production

Almost all the film equipment used came from the equipment cage at the Southern Documentary Project (SouthDocs). The majority of the film was shot with a Lumix GH4 or GH5. I used a Pocket OSMO for one of the driving shots and brought a scanner to the archives at Mississippi Valley to scan images from the student unrest box, yearbooks, and from Floyd Bailey's personal collection. I also used my iPhone camera to take pictures of yearbooks when time was more limited (some of which I regret because of how much editing they required after).

To set up locations for shooting the footage, I had to rely on space that those being interviewed found comfortable and that were easily accessible for them. I interviewed Charles Barron at the Mississippi Delta Council for Farmworkers in Clarksdale, Mississippi, where he lives. We were able to use the space upstairs, which was a large conference room. Next, I interviewed Theophilus King in the studio at SouthDocs, where I had some audio problems for unknown reasons. I interviewed Margie Quince at the Gulfport Public Library, where we also had access to a room upstairs, with a green wall and fluorescent lighting. I interviewed Eddie Carthan at his home in Tchula, Mississippi and Dennis Sells's home in Shreveport, Louisiana. Floyd Bailey met with me in the archives at Mississippi Valley and I used two cameras for his interview. I met with Beverly Wade Hogan at a small café in Jackson Mississippi, in a private room which I was able to reserve for a two hour block. The room proved to be an unfortunate location for audio, as it was next to the kitchen where they were making smoothies and outside chatter was easily heard, but it was a space that Hogan found comfortable.



Once I had the interview footage as well as the archival footage from both the Mississippi State archives and those of Mississippi Valley State, I began the long process of editing the film. For the editing I used Adobe Premiere.

In producing the film, I learned very quickly many of the limitations that a filmmaker must confront in planning a film. Aside from the obvious problems of time and resources in finding appropriate materials and individuals to interview who participated in an event that took place more than fifty years ago, financial considerations play a major role in determining how and what to shoot and what other types of content can be used in the project. Frequent trips to Itta Bena were themselves a significant cost for a graduate student. Those costs, however, were predictable and expected. What was surprising was the cost of using archival materials in the film. There were many limitations in making a documentary on a topic of this sort by a student documentary filmmaker in addition to the problem of finding respondents who participated in the actual event, the protests at Mississippi Valley State College in February 1970. If the most significant limitations of production choices ultimately proved to be financial, the most surprising cost was in the use of archival video footage and still photographs housed by the State of Mississippi. The Mississippi Department of Archives and History staff were extremely helpful and supportive of my project. The MDAH building was beautiful, and I loved every day that I was there looking at the materials they had available, but there I saw the prohibitive costs of archival research involving visual media. To use archival footage, even archival materials in the public domain, is prohibitively expensive. For non-profit academic use, the cost of adding historical footage to the documentary is \$4.00 per second. To use just three minutes of archival footage in a half-hour documentary adds \$720 to the cost of production. If the film were to be a commercial project in which worldwide rights were granted, costs could range up to \$100 per second! There was very powerful footage available

regarding the events of 1970, but given the costs, I had to limit what I was to include and monitor every second of footage that would appear in the documentary.

#### 4. The Ethics of Documentary Filmmaking

Stella Bruzzi writes, “Documentary film is traditionally perceived to be the hybrid offspring of a perennial struggle between the forces of objectivity (represented by the ‘documents’ or facts that underpin it) and the forces of subjectivity (that is a translation of those facts in representation form).”<sup>7</sup> We know that documentaries are not objective. Decisions are made from lighting to angle to the questions asked and even more decisions are made in the post-production process.

Ultimately, the goal is to make an entertaining film that is both aesthetically appealing, factually accurate, and tells the story that *I* want to tell. As Bill Nichols writes in his book *Representing Reality*, “At the heart of documentary is less a *story* and its imaginary world than an *argument* about the historical world.”<sup>8</sup> In the act of making a documentary film that would give voice to those who risked being forgotten, I wanted to make the interviews the center of narrative construction of my film. At the same time, I realize that I still must make the decision out of hours of interview footage which parts will be chosen, which will be omitted, and still be fair in those choices to the overall spirit and context of the story details each respondent expressed in their complete interviews.

Sometimes the decisions regarding what to leave out were difficult. One example of the problems of choice in editing came in my interview with Margie Quince. Quince told me that Fannie Lou Hamer helped get the protesters out of Parchman in 1970. It was a moving story and Fannie Lou Hamer was certainly a compelling figure, but as I researched the process in which the

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<sup>7</sup> Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2011), 36.

<sup>8</sup> Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 1991), 11.

decision was made to release the students, I could find no corroborating material to support that claim. Nowhere else in the archives could I find anything to support that claim that Hamer exerted influence on the decision, nor did any other of the interviewers express any knowledge. It may absolutely be true that Fannie Lou Hamer *did* help get the protesters out and I have no doubt that Quince was sincere in her account, but in order to maintain as much historical accuracy as possible, I took it out of my first cut. There were other similar instances, but as many documentary filmmakers face, I had hours of footage and much more interesting material than I could possibly include, so I made many decisions in which the inclusion or exclusion of material could be justifiably made in either case.

As a historian and a filmmaker, I had difficulty balancing my urge to include *every* detail with contrasting opinions and insights and the urge to focus only on what I deemed the most important ones to move the story forward in a way that only film can do. There were some holes in the narrative, but I avoided using a voiceover narration, despite going back and forth on the decision, because I wanted to avoid a style that some have deemed outdated. Though I did not use voiceover narration and let the participants be the only speaking voices of the film (other than that included in historical footage), we know that there is always an implicit narrator in the form of the camera. There is always a point-of-view represented by the camera in which all the film content is mediated for the viewer. Lieza Louw writes, “The roadmap for a documentary film inevitably changes between the research, planning and recording stages, as the genre of filmmaking should never be prescriptive. However, the final product should include all the points necessary to present a person or an issue not as propaganda, but as part of a discourse that provides enough information for the audience to engage with meaningfully and critically.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Lieza Louw, “*Shooting Sardines in a Barrel* (2012): Documentary Filmmaking and the Archive,” *De Arte* 50, no. 92 (2015): pp. 68-81, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043389.2015.11877225>, 75.

The decisions regarding what to include and where was not simply one of choosing from more raw footage than could be included in the final cut. One example of another kind of choice I had to make regarded one of the historic photographs of Parchman. Initially when Beverly Wade Hogan described how “some of the young ladies began to have emotional reactions,” I included a photograph of Parchman that had women in it, but it was not of the Mississippi Valley State protesters. As such it represented an anachronism that I felt was ultimately misleading to an audience. As such, I moved the photograph earlier in the film as an image fitting to a more general discussion of the history of the prison. As I have progressed further and further through the filmmaking process, I have realized that each decision ultimately has ethical and rhetorical effects that must be accounted for.

## 5. Conclusion

The driving force behind this project was to preserve a moment in history that has been largely forgotten and to give voice to a living history that is in danger of disappearing. The participants in the campus protests in 1970 are now mostly in their seventies. From the raw and unfiltered experience of events, the filmmaker constructs a narrative that casts some type of order for an audience to make sense of what has happened in the past, the context in which those events have taken place, and the larger context in which we try to understand how the events of the past helped construct the world and world view in which we see our own time and place. My hope is that this modest project can help serve the function of reminding us of those who struggled in the past and giving us a context to understand where we are now and how the continuing struggles today are rooted in a vibrant past that still shapes us.

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## APPENDIX

### “AGITATE, AGITATE, AGITATE”: STORIES FROM MISSISSIPPI VALLEY, PARCHMAN, AND THE LARGEST MASS ARREST OF STUDENTS IN U.S. HISTORY

#### INTRODUCTION

May 1970 has been indelibly etched in the American mind. On May 4, 1970, four students were shot dead by the National Guard at Kent State University in Ohio. On May 12, 1970, on the historically black campus of Jackson State University, city and state police shot and killed two students during a student-led march on Lynch Street. What is not ingrained in the American public’s memory is what took place only nine weeks before Kent State in the Mississippi Delta, when 894 black student activists at Mississippi Valley State College, now University, were arrested in what remains the largest mass arrest of its kind in the history of the United States.

In February 1970, fifty-eight black officers descended onto the campus of Mississippi Valley State College (MVSC) in the small Delta town of Itta Bena, Mississippi ready to confront student demonstrators at the historically black college. Members of the ad hoc police force came from various police departments across the state and included recently deputized janitorial and cafeteria personnel from the school—all fully armed and equipped with riot gear. “They landed on Mississippi Valley State as though we were under siege or that we were really dangerous individuals with a threat to not only the university, but probably the state of Mississippi. I’d never seen so many officers there!” recalled Dr. Beverly Wade Hogan, who was an eighteen-year-old sophomore from Crystal Springs at the time of her arrest. Hogan, who would eventually rise to the position of Tougaloo College president years later, was a vocal member of the Student Government Association (SGA), the group leading the protests and boycott of classes.

After putting pressure on the administration for two years, student unrest at Mississippi Valley State College reached its apex. Though hardly gaining the national attention of students at such institutions as Berkeley, Columbia, Michigan, and Cornell during the Vietnam era of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the

undergraduates at Mississippi Valley enthusiastically participated in this new era of student activism. Just as it had been at Berkeley and Columbia and universities around the world, this new era of student activism coincided with a new era of armed repression on college campuses. Although the police did not open fire at these students in rural Mississippi, no tear gas cannisters were launched at the large gatherings of students, and bloodshed was thankfully avoided, the implicit threat of police violence resulted in the largest mass arrest ever on an American college campus. On February 10, 1970, nearly 900 students were rounded up, put on ten school buses, and shipped off to one of the South's most notorious prisons, the Mississippi State Penitentiary otherwise known as Parchman Farm.

The little town of Itta Bena in Leflore County is in the heart of the Mississippi Delta. Itta Bena was still growing in population in 1970, but even at its height, never exceeded three thousand residents. Its population in 1970 was 2,489, according to the U.S. Census, and that population was overwhelmingly black and poor. Other than being home to the college, Itta Bena's claim to fame was that B.B. King was born on the nearby Berclair cotton plantation, and Deacon Jones, the all-pro NFL defensive lineman and member of the Los Angeles Rams legendary "Fearsome Foursome," had played his senior year season at the college in 1960. Jones, interestingly enough, transferred to the college, known at the time as Mississippi Vocational College, after losing his scholarship at South Carolina State for participating in civil rights demonstrations in 1958.

The college itself was only twenty years old in 1970. When Mississippi Vocational College (MVC) "opened" in 1950, the school had fourteen students, seven faculty members, and zero campus facilities. It had only changed its name to Mississippi Valley State College in 1964 when it began to offer liberal arts degrees. Itta Bena and Mississippi Valley, then still a relatively modest college, hardly seemed a likely spot for such a large and profound confrontation, but it was precisely the relative isolation of the community and its racial makeup that has kept the events there largely unnoticed. That May, the cataclysmic events at Kent State and Jackson State would quickly overshadow the students in Itta Bena and leave them largely forgotten. The events that February in the small Delta community, however, represent an important chapter in the history of student unrest in the 1960s and early 1970s and the response of state and federal government to

dissent. The battles were never simple and the issues not always so obvious, but what happened at Mississippi Valley State College reflected the larger struggle for civil rights that continues to this day, and reveals how those struggles manifested themselves in complex and sometimes unexpected ways.

By February 10, 1970, the fifth day of a student-led strike at the college, the tension that had been building between students and the administration all year reached its climax. Late that evening, the officers lined up the nearly 900 students who had gathered to demonstrate on campus. After they had lined up, students were ushered by the police onto ten yellow school buses. The students were only told that they would be sent to an undisclosed location. Unbeknownst to any of them, they were all headed to the notorious “Parchman Farm,” a clear effort to strike fear in those who were willing to challenge the authority of the college administration, and by extension the authority of the state of Mississippi. The hope was that sending in armed officers with riot gear would be enough to scare the students and end the demonstrations. Black officers were deliberately chosen for the job, not only because campus, state, and federal leaders recognized that, given Mississippi’s long-standing reputation as racist, having white officers respond to black student demonstrators would not play well before a national audience, but also to show students that a narrower black audience would not universally support their position. “We knew that sending in black officers—or officers, period—with guns on was another form of intimidation,” said Dr. Theophilus King, then a senior from Bay Springs and SGA chaplain. However, the officers did not intimidate them, and, if anything, acted as though they shared a kinship (although their treatment towards students varied). “So that failed,” he continued. “So, the only thing they had left was to send us to the worst penal institution in the country and that was Parchman in Sunflower County.”

The arrest of 894 students at Mississippi Valley State College was and remains the largest mass arrest of students in the history of the United States. The incident at Valley in 1970 was unprecedented, not only because of its size, or the demographics of the arresting police, but also because it was the first police action conducted with the advice and aid of the federal government, through the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA). The LEAA was established in 1968 as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s Omnibus Crime Bill, enacted under Richard Nixon who was elected that year. This federal and state

coordination regarding the handling of campus protests was unprecedented. Yet as much as the tragedy at Jackson State always lives in the shadows of the events at Kent State in the national consciousness, the events at Mississippi Valley State remain virtually obliterated from our collective memory.

The primary function of this thesis is to give increased visibility to this vitally important event in Mississippi history, primarily through the first-person accounts collected from former student activists—portions of which are included in the short film which accompanies this paper. For this written portion, more detail and contextual background is offered on the events surrounding the mass arrest and the sources that reported on it. This paper will begin by detailing some of the background of the controversial and complex college founder, James Herbert “J. H.” White, through his rise to the presidency, which lasted from 1950 until 1971. Chapter one presents some of the history of Mississippi Valley State University, with an emphasis on its student activism, and contextualization within the larger Civil Rights and Black Power Movements in Mississippi. The radical history of student activism in Mississippi has been systemically erased and cast to the margins of our collective memory, and this chapter discusses how and why that is as it pertains to this story.

Chapter two offers a chronological account of the February 1970 unrest based on a variety of primary sources published in 1970, which represent starkly different points of view. The most detailed and “official” piece of historical evidence is a document entitled “Construction of Events Leading to the Closing of Mississippi Valley State College On February 11 1970,” published by the college administration on February 14 during the short period of school closure. Although it is presented as a factual report of the incident and its background, the administration’s point of view and biases are evident. According to the foreword, written and personally signed by President J. H. White, the report was produced with three aims: first, to give an account of the student unrest from January 9, 1970 to February 11, 1970; second, “to show how *outside agitation* was a definite reason for part of the unrest and how the administration tried to solve it”; and third, “to give various statements from the Student Government Association officers which proves no administration can communicate with students when they are *belligerent, disrespectful, overbearing, and arrogant*” (emphasis added). Additionally, two confidential reports written by LEAA insiders—Kenneth Fairly,

Director of Mississippi's LEAA Division, and Ray Pope from the LEAA's Atlanta office, both of whom visited the college during the unrest as liaisons and recounted their experiences—offer more background on the event and insight into the state's motives and perspective. This paper relies heavily on periodicals, including articles from local and state publications such as *The Greenwood Commonwealth*, *The Delta Democrat-Times*, *The Hattiesburg American*, and *The Clarion-Ledger*, as well as those in a limited number of national outlets, including *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and *Jet*. A counternarrative to the “official” reports appears in several underground radical publications, most notably in Atlanta's *The Great Speckled Bird*, which included voices and points of view that were suppressed or ignored in the official accounts. While all of these sources have their own motives, biases, and flaws, they are invaluable, considering the relatively limited scope of this story.

Chapter three turns to the oral histories collected from former students, and one former staff photographer, at Mississippi Valley State. These are first-hand accounts of the events at Mississippi Valley State, albeit looking backwards from a vantage point half a century later. These voices provide an important oral history and humanize what might otherwise be a minor footnote to the student and civil rights unrest in the mid-twentieth century. These accounts recall what the experience was like for young people to engage in a struggle and confront the possibility of state violence and state power in response to civil rights demands that were clearly denied to them as students. Through their voices, we can also see the profound and lasting effects of their struggle. Their ability to tell their stories can also serve to fill in some of the gaps left by the pre-existing narratives. Finally, the essay concludes by examining the scope of this project and exploring what work remains.

## CHAPTER ONE:

### THE RISE OF RADICAL STUDENT ACTIVISM AT MISSISSIPPI VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

To those of my race who depend on bettering their condition in a foreign land, or who underestimate the importance of cultivating friendly relations with the Southern white man who is their next door neighbor, I would say: “Cast down your bucket where you are.” Cast it down, making friends in every manly way of the people of all races, by whom you are surrounded.

- Booker T. Washington, *Atlanta Exposition Address* (1895)

When you buck against me, you’re bucking against power, rich white folk’s power, the nation’s power—which means government power! And I’ll tell you something your sociology teachers are afraid to tell you...If there weren’t men like me running schools like this, there’d be no South. No North, either. No, and there’d be no country—not as it is today. You think about that, son...With all your speechmaking and studying I thought you understood something... You’re a black educated fool, son. These white folk have newspapers, magazines, radios, spokesmen to get their ideas across. If they want to tell the world a lie, they can tell it so well that it becomes the truth.

- Dr. Bledsoe in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1952)

Dr. A Hebert Bledsoe is the fictional, Booker T. Washington-type founder and president of the Tuskegee-type college the unnamed narrator wins a scholarship to in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*. The narrator’s existential quest, in which he battled one disillusionment after another, all began at this black college in Greenwood, Alabama under the control of Dr. Bledsoe. The rabbit hole of disillusionment, which ultimately led the narrator underground, was opened upon realizing that the beloved founder of his groundbreaking black Southern college was wearing a mask of deception and hiding who he really was to both the white people in power and the black community under his control. Having exposed unwanted information to Mr. Nelson, a wealthy white donor, the narrator threatened the entire position of the founder and everything he had built. He explained, “although I had not intended it, any act that endangered the

continuity of the dream was an act of treason” (Ellison 134). Bledsoe immediately expelled the narrator and sent him away on a bus—a tactic used by the black college president in a non-fictional story.

Dr. James Herbert White, the non-fictional founder in the story of Mississippi Valley State University, was not as ill-intentioned and evil as the fictional Dr. A Hebert Bledsoe. There are, nevertheless, a number of indisputable parallels between the two. Like Bledsoe, White came from humble beginnings in the Jim Crow South and rose through the ranks to the position of college president, the power bestowed upon him by Northern white idealists and proud Southern white supremacists. White, like Bledsoe, was celebrated in the community for building up, from nothing, an institution dedicated to the education of young black men and women. The hunger for power was not as ravenous for J. H. White, who would never be caught saying, “It’s a nasty deal and I don’t always like it myself. . . But I’ve made my place in it and I’ll have every Negro in the country hanging on tree limbs by morning if it means staying where I am” (Ellison 143). However, both college presidents abused their power and were quick to expel any student or faculty member they perceived as an oppositional threat to the oppressive power structure, which they worked alongside and assisted to empower themselves. They may have worked so closely alongside them, especially in the early days of the college, for the benefit of black Mississippians living in such a dangerous and unequal society with such limited options. Ultimately though, their decision to work so closely with the white power structure caused harm to the same students he claimed to be serving and protecting—though they were left with no other options.

### **James Herbert White: The Man with a Million Friends**

J. H. White’s upbringing explains why he was celebrated by so many, white and black, for being such an exceptional black leader. It also offers insight into why he operated in the ways he did as president, and why, when radical student activism spread at Mississippi Valley State in late 1960s, he responded in the ways he did. Though he was not born into slavery like Booker T. Washington, White’s brand of seemingly pragmatic conservatism stems from the oppressive system he was born into, and the certain successes he accrued by navigating those systems instead of actively challenging them. White came of age at the beginning



of the twentieth century when the policies implemented during Reconstruction were no longer apparent and Jim Crow had effectively taken hold of the South, reestablishing white supremacy into law and society at every level.

White's educational background in Tennessee, both as a student and an administrator, explains why Mississippi leaders eventually found him to be ideal of their black college in the Delta. He was born in Gallatin, Tennessee in 1903 to illiterate parents who were just one generation removed from slavery. At fourteen, White left home for Indianapolis to work and save money for school. After he managed to secure the necessary funds, he attended Tennessee Agricultural & Industrial Normal School (previously Tennessee Agricultural & Industrial State Normal School for Negroes; currently, Tennessee State University), where he met his future wife, Augusta Charter (Townes). As a youth, he worked in hotels in Cleveland, Ohio and Jamestown, New York as a bellhop, which he later implied was significant in teaching him how to interact with white people. White's education continued at Columbia University in New York, where he received his master's degree in education (Lelyveld). He also received an honorary Doctor of Laws from Allen University and an honorary Doctor of Letters from Rust College (Townes).

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, J. H. White became increasingly renowned for his ability to raise funds as the principal of a black school in rural Tennessee. In 1928, he accepted an offer to become principal of Hardeman County Training School in Whiteville, Tennessee, which at the time offered education through the eighth grade. The school was five thousand dollars in debt and the building was dilapidated, with no electricity or functioning toilets. The conditions were the result of a "disconnected" black community and a white community that was "either indifferent or hostile toward African American education," according to historian A. Jane Townes.<sup>1</sup> Not long after taking the position as principal, White managed to organize community support and "successfully solicited the County Board of Education to make basic repairs" (Townes). His fundraising efforts locally exceeded goals and eradicated the school's debt. The school then added vocational training and White began to expand the campus.

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that Townes is the author of the article "James Herbert White" in the *Tennessee Encyclopedia*, which only included White's autobiography, *Up From a Cotton Patch* (1979) in the suggested reading. Unfortunately, the autobiography is out of print and housed in the archives, therefore unavailable as a source for this project.

As the campus grew, so too did the scope of White's power. In 1930, a full high school program was implemented at Hardeman County Training School, and the black community petitioned to have the school renamed Allen-White High School, paying homage to the two principals who helped establish it (Townes). By 1932, the school offered both four-year and vocational programs. The school continued to grow through the 1940s, despite the Depression economy, and White became increasingly renowned for his fundraising abilities, bringing the school national attention and his methods became a model for rural education on a national scale (Townes). The unlikely growth of the campus during that time was due, in large part, to the use of student labor, which spared white supremacists in power from even having to consider providing sufficient funds for black education.

White led Allen-White High School until 1948, when he took his final and most challenging position in Tennessee to date at Lane College, a private, black Methodist college located in Jackson. Lane had similar problems of debt and accreditation as Hardeman, which made White an ideal fit for a leadership position. After accepting the college presidency, he launched another widespread fundraising campaign and mobilized both those inside and those outside of the institution, convincing faculty and staff to take cuts from their payroll in order to contribute and expecting students to raise a certain amount from donors. During this campaign, he came up with the slogan that he would then eventually repurpose to Mississippi Vocational College. The "theme for off-campus solicitations was the 'Book of a Million Friends,'" which involved reaching out to "alumni, parents, black and white residents of the area, and relatives, friends, and colleagues of those groups" (Townes). The goal was for each contact to donate \$1.00 "until they recorded one million donor names" (Townes). By December 1949, Lane College received full accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools (SACS), which was a struggle and substantial victory for black schools across the South.

### **The Most Southern Place on Earth**

However difficult the territory was in Tennessee for black folks, Mississippi stood in a class of its own. While he was still at Lane College in 1949, it was reported in the *Greenwood Commonwealth* on August 18

that White was “the proposed head of the Itta Bena institution” (“Report Made On Negro College”). In 1950, the year he took over Mississippi Vocational College, no state spent less than Mississippi on the education of its black residents at \$122.93 per white child and \$32.55 per black child, a ratio of almost four to one (Williamson 35). Whatever added difficulties and disadvantages black people faced in the state of Mississippi, those in the Delta faced that many more. White’s fundraising skills and proven ability to develop a black college would be required to build up any black college in the Mississippi Delta, the blackest and poorest part of the state, despite having the richest agricultural land.

Like the founder of Ellison’s fictional college set in Alabama, J. H. White serves as a leading antagonist in the saga of student activism as Mississippi Valley, but neither can serve as *the* sole antagonist. The opponents fighting against black liberation in the novel and in Mississippi are numerous, complicated, and all function to empower the power structure which actively resisted black education and black self-determination. The leaders of the country’s most aggressive white supremacist state appointed White as a strategic decision. Throughout his professional life, White proved more than willing to work with and for white supremacists in power, Northern white donors, and rural black families. Even more, he was ardently opposed to integration and the NAACP, making him ideal as leader of Mississippi’s first legislation-approved black college in the state. Joy Ann Williamson, author of *Radicalizing the Ebony Tower: Black Colleges and the Black Freedom Struggle in Mississippi*, explains:

enmity toward the black freedom struggle made constitutional provisions, court rulings, and federal protections null and void. The legislature, governor, board of trustees, Sovereignty Commission, and other white officials vowed to undermine any initiatives that smacked of racial equality and made the possibility of black public institutions acting as movement centers virtually impossible (116-117).

White’s ability to connect with various people who had proximity to power was an effective survival tactic for a black man living in the Jim Crow South. His capacity to thrive in this oppressive system where violence was a constant threat and a few white men held power should not be understated.

Even though White’s mission for the college was limited by the vision of the white supremacist state, he actively served as a weapon of the state at the end of his tenure as Valley. The “friends” of the

college he proudly boasted of were the same powerful white men that actively worked to subjugate black lives and keep black schools and education unequal. They included racist Mississippi Governors Fielding L. Wright, Paul R. Johnson, Jr., John Bell Williams, and Ross Barnett, all proud segregationists, and all people White proudly hung photographs of in his office and had published in yearbooks. His friends also included the white segregationists on the Board of Trustees of Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL Board), appointed by the governor, and those on the Sovereignty Commission, whom he actively worked for as an informant. They include the local and state police, who actively arrested and sometimes were violent to his students. Their dedication to oppression is evident in how they treated anyone who challenged their authority in any way, as we see in the case of students at Mississippi Valley.

The needs and desires of the black college students at the college evolved from 1950 to 1970, and the students wanted to replace Dr. White's Booker T. Washington-like leadership and vision with something much more radical. By the late 1960s, his level of control and the way in which he enforced his power was oppressive, and his depiction of the justifiably angry, but always non-violent students was unfair and put their safety at great risk. Though bloodshed was successfully avoided, he still sought the assistance of riot-gear equipped police and untrained staff from the college, knowing that could be harmful to his students. Not to mention he regularly volunteered information to the Sovereignty Commission and the IHL board of political activity, quickly fired faculty members supportive of the movement, and suspended, expelled, or stripped the scholarships from dissenting student activists. Like Dr. Bledsoe, Dr. White was not going to let any student threaten the college he built up from nothing.

### **The Development of Mississippi Vocational College (1943-1950)**

The origins of Mississippi Valley State University's development can be traced to 1943 and the Delta Council, a controversial chamber of commerce-type group founded in 1935 made up of wealthy white planters. As the Second World War raged on, Mississippians in power increasingly feared forced integration considering the high percentage of their young black population fighting overseas and expecting education, among other rights, upon their arrival home. Amidst those fears, the Delta Council recommended an

expanded “program in the study of race...relations and the maintenance of harmonious understanding between the two races of the Delta” (qtd. in Hudspeth). White supremacists, as the Delta Council did in this example, often used language in specific, subtle ways to mask their racism with something that sounded peaceful and democratic. The “harmonious understanding between the two races in the Delta” they were trying to maintain was the understanding of the “place” someone was allowed to occupy based on their race.

What the Delta Council understood about “the two races in the Delta” and what they believed about black education are demonstrated in the remarks made by two members at the Seventeenth Annual Christian Conference of Negro Women on June 6, 1943 in Jackson. There, about sixty people heard S. H. Kyle, the Delta Council director-at-large, discuss “the economic advantages to the colored race of the plantation system” and told them “Negro leaders” needed to “feel...a greater responsibility to their own people” (“Delta Council Officials Address Negro Conference”). He emphasized that the “so-called ‘problem’ in racial relations in the state of Mississippi was just as grave a responsibility to the Negro race as to the white” (“Delta Council...”).

The Delta Council further demonstrated why they were known as “the institutional voice of Mississippi paternalism” (Crespino) in the address made next by Delta Council manager, Mrs. Dorothy Lee Black, on the subject of education. She discussed the three kinds of education--academic, vocational, and religious—that were carried out in four institutions: academic school, vocational school, church, and home. Black put “special emphasis...on the need for Negroes to learn to make a living while in attendance at school and upon *the value of working with their hands* in a state whose primary industry is agriculture” (“Delta Council...”, emphasis added). The decision to address education at a black conference showed they were feeling pressured by the black community to address black education. They chose to address it in ways that on the surface, sounded like they supported education for black people, but put the responsibility and pressure on black leaders and emphasized a kind of education that kept black people of their “place.” That November of 1943, the Delta Council passed the resolution calling for a training and vocational school for “negroes” in the region. They also passed a resolution for more “hospitalization facilities for them, including

the establishment of a Negro tuberculosis hospital after the war” (“Advanced Education...”), which shows how the war was forcing white leaders to address the needs of its black residents in ways it had not before.

By 1946, a year after the culmination of World War II, the Mississippi legislature responded to the recommendation given by the Council, as well as to growing pressure to educate black GIs. The legislature authorized “the creation of a black institution in the Mississippi Delta that would ‘train teachers for the rural and elementary schools and to provide vocational education’” (Hudspeth, quoting Charter 327 House Bill No. 700). More specifically, the school would train “negro youth in mechanics covering bricklaying, carpentry and other phases such as mechanized farming and the girls in domestic science in combination for teacher training to instruct the negroes better in this line” (“Report Made On Negro College”). The *vocational* in Mississippi Vocational College (MVC), as it was so named until 1964, was synonymous with “black,” and was telling of the kind of education black students could expect. As James W. Loewen writes, “‘Moderate’ white supremacists in the state used ‘vocational’ as a sweetener to persuade more extreme racist legislators to swallow the idea of another college for African Americans” (236). Many were swayed because they saw vocational training as a good business investment, particularly with the rise of cotton mechanization (236). However, the primary goal of the white power structure in providing black educational opportunities was always to discourage black Mississippians from applying to any of the white colleges in the state and to prevent integration from becoming a reality (Hudspeth).

In the years between the legislature’s approval of the black junior college in 1946 and its formal groundbreaking in 1950, the location of the school was a source a contentious debate among white landowners and politicians in power. The IHL Board initially proposed for the school to be in Greenwood at the Army Air Base, where facilities were ready for use, making it the most cost-effective choice. The white business leaders in Greenwood and those in nearby Carroll County fought this, worrying “about having so many young African Americans in their town” (Loewen 235). The state then proposed an unincorporated site on Highway 82, eight miles away from Greenwood (235). The Leflore County Board of Supervisors, presumably to encourage its placement outside of Greenwood and the city limits of Itta Bena but still within

the county borders, agreed to contribute \$20,000 to the construction of the school, and agreed to build their roads (“Itta Bena Site...”).

The initial question of MVC’s location had to do with funding and the state’s resistance against having to provide any funds at all. The state’s initial appropriation was only \$300,000 to build the college and did not initially anticipate having to buy land for its site. Though Carroll County and residents in Greenwood did not want it, a bidding war ensued among those that did want to sell the land to the state for whatever reason. A group from Indianola interested in establishing the college there offered 449 acres for a site located on Highway 49, of which 102 acres were offered without cost. Additionally, Indianola citizens offered \$5000 bonus and county authorities agreed to build the highways for the school. Even so, the cost of the land in Indianola—\$56,155—was \$6,155 more than the cost of the land outside Itta Bena (“Itta Bena Site”). The site on Highway 82 was cheaper because it was on “buckshot land,” which did not drain well, and therefore was not ideal for cotton cultivation, making it less valuable than that in Indianola (Loewen 235). The site chosen in unincorporated Leflore County, two miles outside of Itta Bena, was ultimately decided by the IHL board, led by Dr. H. M. Ivy of Meridian, who chose the least expensive option that most appeased white business owners.

### **The Early Years (1950-1954)**

The institution, from the beginning, was clearly and firmly in the hands of Mississippi’s white power structure. The main speaker at the groundbreaking ceremony on Friday, February 10, 1950 was a wealthy planter from the Delta and staunch segregationist, Governor Fielding L. Wright (“Wright Speaks...”). Wright served as vice presidential candidate on the unsuccessful Dixiecrat ticket alongside Strom Thurmond only two years earlier and supported Senator Theodore G. Bilbo, a member of the Ku Klux Klan and fellow segregationist, in his bid for reelection. Reminiscent of the show put on by Dr. Bledsoe in *Invisible Man*, Ibram X. Kendi writes, “HBCUs increasingly laid out the red carpet for trustees, state and federal politicians, and philanthropists to court their political and economic favor in grand spectacles that bordered on minstrelsy” (14). Such was the case at MVC from the time of its groundbreaking ceremony, where music was

provided by band members from Mississippi's other black public colleges, Alcorn Agricultural & Mechanical College (where Medgar and Charles Evers were undergraduates and student activists in 1950), Jackson State College, and Coahoma County Junior College and High School. At these types of ceremonies at HBCUs, including the very first at MVC, "the artistic, moral, aesthetic, and manual talents of students and the college were displayed with more pomp than intellectual acumen" (14). Slave spirituals were also sung as part of MVC's groundbreaking ceremony, which, according to Kendi "harkened the benefactors back to the good ole days of slavery...as many HBCUs resembled plantations with black and white slave drivers for presidents, powerless faculty as slaves, students as the cotton, and corporate capital as the slaveholders" (14).

When White first assumed control of the black college, the school itself was merely 450 acres of cotton land, siphoned off from of a lowland plantation owned by Ralph Lembo, "with no buildings, lights, roads, students, or faculty" (Williamson 18). White was given the task of completely developing the school "up from a cotton patch," a phrase he used frequently, which eventually served as the title of his memoir. Initial building plans were difficult to bring to life, considering the legislature left the school underfunded, as they perceived the school in the Delta to be "the least important of the three black public colleges" (18). In order to earn extra money for its building campaign, "the campus resorted to...leasing land to farmers and selling crops grown by the students" (18). The labor of students on campus, who did not yet live on the campus, was the same vocational labor white supremacists were reliant on to maintain their wealth through the subjugation of black people, by demanding they perform hard labor as opposed to getting the kind of education white students in Mississippi were able to.

The early years at Mississippi Vocational College were dedicated to the construction and growth of the campus and increasing the number of programs and enrolled students. A full-page article was published in the *Delta Democrat-Times* on May 8, 1952, written by Albert W. Spruill, a professor in the Department of Agriculture at MVC, entitled "Delta's Negro School Is Rapidly Expanding." Spruill began his piece stressing how the very idea of a black college in the Delta, "the heart of Mississippi's plantation system," was inconceivable and "absurd" only a decade prior, despite being a region with one of the highest percentages of black residents in the nation. By 1952, he claimed, the school "poses to become one of the most powerful



forces for Negro education in the South.” In less than two years, MVC grew “from an undrained plantation to an attractive \$750,000 plant.” The entire campus was comprised of six completed buildings-- the shop building, a general academic and administrative building which housed the temporary library, two “ultra-modern” dormitories, and a cafeteria. More pristine than any other building, though, was the president’s mansion: “It is constructed with beautiful yellow face brick and in addition to other outstanding features has a glassed-in breezeway and a two-car garage” (Spruill). Plans for continued growth were always forthcoming. In the first two years, the staff increased from nine to seventeen regular faculty members, and twenty-one other staff members. The construction of faculty houses (who were living in trailers on campus), an assembly hall, mechanics building, and home economics building were underway, though there was no mention of plans for a permanent library.

As early as 1952, MVC was already coined “the college with a million friends” (Spruill). Two of the college’s publicly celebrated “friends” included “two of the most racist political leaders in Mississippi history”—Fielding Wright and Walter Sillers Jr (Loewen 236). Sillers, like Fielding, was a fellow Delta planter and avid segregationist who spent fifty years in Mississippi politics as a member of the state House of Representatives from 1916 until his death in 1966. His last twenty-two years were spent as Mississippi Speaker of the House, and when Wright and fellow segregationists walked out of the DNC in 1948 in protest of the adoption of a civil rights bill to their platform, thereby inaugurating the Dixiecrat movement, he praised them for their brave willingness to fight for the South against communism (Sperry). He led the Delta Council in the early 1940s, and later was an active member of the Sovereignty Commission. In the years leading up to the *Brown* decision, he was instrumental in getting the legislature to pass the resolution for the black school in the Delta, convincing them blacks would settle for vocational training instead of even considering trying to integrate any of the white schools in the state (Sperry). The “friendship” between the college and these white supremacists is proudly symbolized on the campus through the Sillers Fine Arts Building and the Fielding L. Wright Science Complex. From the beginning, White wanted to assure the college’s “friends,” *i.e.*, the white political structure who funded them, that Mississippi Vocational College was

not going to be movement center and he reassured them by naming two of the largest buildings on campus after two of the state's leading segregationists.

By 1953, the college had its first graduating class, which totaled twelve students, nine of whom received their degree in elementary education. A certificate of completion in the field of agriculture, in lieu of a bachelor's degree, was presented to the majority of students who were in vocational training programs (Hudspeth). In 1954, MVC finally constructed enough dormitories on campus to focus on its majority-residential student body and began to phase out early bus transportation and extension services. That same year, on May 17, 1954—or what segregationists would refer to as “Black Monday”—the Supreme Court sent a shock to individual and institutional systems in Mississippi and throughout the South when they were forced to confront the quality of black education and integration in public schools.

### **The *Brown* Decision and the Black College President in Mississippi (1954-1956)**

To the complete dismay of the white power structure in the South, four years after Mississippi Vocational College was opened, the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) decision was handed down by the liberal Earl Warren-led Supreme Court. The ruling declared that state laws establishing racial segregation in public schools were unconstitutional, regardless of conditions. The decision partially overruled the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, which determined that “separate but equal” public facilities did not violate the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The following year, the Court passed a second ruling, instructing states to de-segregate their public schools “with all deliberate speed.” These federal policies terrified white supremacists in the American South, who promised to fight against them and defend their racist, oppressive way of life by making it as difficult as possible to enforce.

White supremacists in Mississippi reacted to the *Brown* decision swiftly and violently, as demonstrated by the establishment of the White Citizens' Council only two months after “Black Monday.” The organization's first chapter was established July 1954 in Greenwood, Mississippi<sup>2</sup> just a few miles over from

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<sup>2</sup> The exact location in which the first chapter was established in the Delta is contested. Some scholars, like Stephanie R. Rolph, a historian at Millsaps College, claim that it was Indianola (“The Citizens Council”), while some historians such as Joy Ann Williamson, claim it was Greenwood.

Mississippi Vocational College's campus, before spreading across the state (and the region). The White Citizens' Council claimed to be a more "civilized" and less violent alternative to the Ku Klux Klan, as they were comprised of white elites in business, law, medicine, and politics throughout the state. In reality, they operated as violently as the Klan, the White Knights, or the Americans for the Preservation of the White Race, which appeared shortly thereafter and terrorized black citizens throughout the state—but especially in the Delta, where power was concentrated in the hands of such a small minority of wealthy white men (Williamson 36). Charles Payne points out that the Citizens' Council pursued "the agenda of the Klan with the demeanor of the rotary" (qtd. in Williamson 8). Unsurprisingly, considering their formation was a response to the *Brown* decision, the first mission of the White Citizens' Council was to protect white schools from black children, whose education they were committed to suppressing. They immediately led a movement of "white flight" to private academies across the state to preserve segregated schools, while they prepared to once again face their fate at the hands of the federal government.

After the *Brown* decision and the 1955 mandate to desegregate with all deliberate speed, black educational institutions were "put in a delicate situation" (115). Across the South, governors and legislators promised to defy the Court "and enlisted the assistance of black conservatives" (115). In the summer of 1954, Mississippi Governor Hugh L. White organized a meeting with about ninety black leaders from around the state to discuss the decision (Loewen 237). The group included J. H. White, Percy Greene, the conservative editor of the black periodical, *Jackson Advocate*, who would later serve as a fellow Sovereignty Commission informant, and John D. Boyd, then president of Utica Normal and Industrial Institute, a public black junior college. Boyd would soon replace Alcorn's then-president, Jesse R. Otis, who was fired after aligning with student activists following harmful comments published by anti-communist professor Clennon King (115). Governor White asked the group of black leaders to support a voluntary segregation plan offered to expand the existing equalization program in exchange. To his surprise, several black leaders spoke in favor of abolishing segregation and in the end, only two black men at the meeting supported the Governor's plan—one of whom was J. H. White (Loewen 237).

For some of the black leaders at the meeting—those who would later work for the Sovereignty Commission—they “demurred in their demands for racial equality” because they operated “in a climate in which many Americans believed in the inevitability of a race war and were aware of massive and violent white antipathy toward desegregation” (Williamson 115). As college presidents, they were also not quick to challenge the governor or the legislature, who “dangled the carrot of increased funding for segregated schools” (115). Like Booker T. Washington, these black educational leaders worked with and for the white power structure and “interpreted their role not as race traitors but as racial pragmatists working to alleviate racial tension” (115). They even proudly boasted that the world would be a much better place if there were a lot more black men like them. In Percy Greene’s words, “The greatest need in Jackson, in Mississippi, and in the rest of the South is more and more ‘Uncle Toms’” (115). J. H. White, with similar sentiments, was quoted in the *New York Times* saying, “I’ve tried to make friends for my children and if that makes me an Uncle Tom, then every state should have 25 Uncle Toms just like me. If they did, America would have double the strength it has now” (qtd. in Lelyveld).

The decisions made by these black college presidents were often glaringly aligned with the interests of the oppressors, as opposed to the interests of the students, the college, or the black community at large. They were put in a difficult position as both black leaders of a school designed to bring opportunities and education to young marginalized black Mississippians, but if they attempted to do anything that challenged what those in power wanted, they were easily disposable and replaceable. Joy Ann Williamson writes:

The white power structure never sincerely supported black education, much less black higher education, and black presidents believed the monetary windfall for black schools in the post-*Brown* era could transform them into first-rate institutions. Whether that education would afford blacks the ability to participate equally in the existing social structure or in a segregated black society was a matter left unaddressed (115).

To be sure, the education black Mississippians received did not afford them equal access in the existing social structure, but instead those in power found new ways to adapt to increasing outside intervention in order to preserve their antiquated, racist society. Though segregationists may have donated to Mississippi Vocational

or been powerful enough to get a building named after them, the school still did not have a library nor books to fill one. Even so, they managed to increase their band and athletic support and scholarships, keeping white people in power and black people on campus happy enough.

All public colleges in Mississippi were (and remain) vulnerable institutions because of their status as “public,” which subjects them entirely to the will of the state. The interference at the University of Mississippi in 1962 by Governor Ross Barnett and the trustees of the IHL Board in their attempts to prohibit James Meredith from enrolling proved that even the historically white schools were hardly immune from direct state intervention. However, the three public four-year black colleges—Alcorn, Jackson State, and Mississippi Vocational—“were even more prone, since they housed black youth who heavily populated the freedom struggle, and the abuses at black colleges often went unnoticed and unchallenged by the national press or academic community” (Williamson 116). “The ideological and educational mission,” according to Joy Ann Williamson, “of Alcorn Agricultural Mechanical College, Jackson State College, and Mississippi Vocational College...was that of the white racists in the state government: education for subservience” (15). Unlike the private black colleges in the state, like Tougaloo and Rust, which allowed for more student involvement, the public black colleges were at the mercy of the governor and the board of trustees. Regardless of how complicated their position was, black college leaders in Mississippi in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly J. H. White, actively served to subdue student activism and the black freedom struggle, which increasingly grew as the decades wore on.

### **The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission**

A primary way for black public college presidents, like J. H. White, to directly assist the white power structure was operating as an informant. The infamous Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission was established in 1956 as a state-sanctioned segregationist, anti-communist watchdog group, similar to the White Citizens’ Council founded in the Delta two years earlier. The two groups, as historian Robert Luckett explains, “were the brainchildren of elite, powerful bitter-enders who flexed a lot of segregationist muscle” (3) and remained intricately linked to one another. The Commission monitored, if they didn’t outright stalk, any

Mississippian they perceived as a threat to their segregated way of life. They tracked hundreds of peoples' every move, conversation, and breath they could manage—including SGA leaders like Wilhelm Joseph, who they wanted to deport, and Tyrone Gettis, whom they were monitoring but could not exile anywhere other than prison. Joy Ann Williams attests: “Because social movements necessarily arise out of contentious and ongoing negotiation between the state and a challenger, the black college and the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission, as organizations created and appropriated by activists on both sides of the movement, are major units of analysis” (9).

Yasuhiro Katagiri’s 2001 book, *The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission: Civil Rights and States’ Rights*, published through the University Press of Mississippi, discusses the history of the Commission and the impact of their “reign.” On March 20, 1955, along with fifty-seven other state representatives, House Speaker Walter Sillers—the same one that helped approve Mississippi Vocational College—introduced House Bill No. 880, “providing for the creation of the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission as part of the executive branch of the state government” (5). Section 5 of the Bill defined the Commission’s purpose:

It shall be the duty of the commission to do and perform any and all acts and things deemed necessary and proper to protect the sovereignty of the State of Mississippi, and her sister states, from encroachment thereon by the Federal Government... and to resist the usurpation of the rights and powers reserved to this state and our sister states by the Federal Government or any branch, department or agency thereof (6).

The Commission was organized to have twelve members total, including four ex officio members: the governor, the lieutenant governor, the House Speaker, and the attorney general. The remaining eight members would consist of two from the Senate appointed by the lieutenant governor, three members of the House appointed by the Speaker, and three citizen members appointed by the governor (6-7). As Katagiri notes, “[t]he segregationist *Jackson Daily News* and the liberal *Greenville Delta Democrat-Times* both agreed that the powers to be vested in the Sovereignty Commission ‘virtually amounted to a blank check’” (7).

The white supremacist power structure was generally very tactical with their use of language, especially of their most racially motivated institutions. Although the term “sovereignty” moved with an “aura

of sophistication and respectability,” the function of the Commission was always ‘to maintain segregation in the state of Mississippi’ and to wreck ‘the NAACP and any other organization which [was] attempting to advocate integration and trample[e]’ the rights reserved to the state” (6). In order to prevent integration, the Commission relied on black informants and quasi-investigators, many of whom were present at the meeting with the governor following the *Brown* decision. As early as June 1956, they conceived of a plan to utilize conservative black leaders. The Commission “vigorously cultivated the great potentialities possessed by ‘a large number of fine, level-headed negro citizens’ who were ‘actively opposed to the NAACP’ and were aware that ‘the best interest of the negro race lies along segregated paths’” (37). One document from 1959 said the black collaborators “have played no small part in helping maintain the status quo of the races...and this problem will never be resolved without the help and cooperation of the negroes in the State of Mississippi” (37).

J. H. White was one of the Sovereignty Commission’s most loyal and diligent informants from the group of “fine, level-headed negro citizens,” and his ties to them began shortly after it was organized in 1956. The agency, which initially served as a massive pro-segregation, pro-states’ rights propaganda project, distributed copies of a pamphlet entitled *A Noted Negro Educator Speaks for Mississippi*, a reprint of an address White made which made the case for racial segregation. A notably shrewd fundraiser, White asked the Commission to purchase typing equipment and help send the band to Texas on Thanksgiving Day, in exchange for his help and cooperation with the agency (38). Demonstrating how interlinked the various organizations of power were in Mississippi, official records show that the Commission’s private investigator invited Euclid R. “E. R.” Jobe, the executive secretary of the IHL board, to his office, “where they tried to determine the credibility of ‘certain negro educators in the State’ as the agency’s ‘[p]ossible negro informants’” (38). Jobe recommended J. H. White, along with Jacob L. Reddix of Jackson State and J. D. Boyd of Alcorn, but warned against trusting any blacks wholeheartedly, especially at first (38-39).

Although black informants were deployed throughout the state, most were concentrated in the Mississippi Delta. Considering the region’s “historical, economic, political, and demographic characters as well as its traditionally paternalistic race relations, the Mississippi Delta was a natural hunting ground for the

Sovereignty Commission to cultivate its black informants” (39). Weekly reviews demonstrate the constant contact the agency had with J. H. White, who “remained steadfast in his support of state aims and worked closely with the Sovereignty Commission to kill the movement on or near the Mississippi Vocational campus” (Williamson 118). In 1955, when Clyde Kennard, a veteran who returned home in Hattiesburg to take care of his family, wanted to attend the University of Southern Mississippi, J. H. White was assigned by the Sovereignty Commission to dissuade him from applying. In 1955, White was successful in his task of preventing him to do so, but by 1959 when he was backed by the NAACP, Kennard followed through. The Commission and the IHL board both talked to White to use his help and make it seem like they had no involvement. White once again spoke to Kennard and tried to convince him to revoke his application to Southern, warning him that the state may close all the black colleges if he persisted and that “this responsibility would be entirely on him” (qtd in. Williamson 121). This time, White failed and the state took more aggressive routes to crush Kennard’s attempts and discredit him. The state managed to convict him on false charges of accessory to burglary and sentenced him to Parchman Prison. He never enrolled at Southern Mississippi and died from cancer intestinal shortly thereafter (121).

The Clyde Kennard episode shows how committed the state was to preventing integration and how dedicated J. H. White was to the state. An NAACP official called White “our enemy #1,” a title he earned by being particularly repressive of the movement (121). Almost from the time it was established, White’s association with the Commission was “well known” and he “made no apologies for his actions” as college president during the volatile years of the black freedom struggle (121). Black presidents of the black public colleges in Mississippi in the 1950s and 1960s did not universally and outright reject the black freedom movement. They did, however, generally disagree with the pace and the direct action-style tactics that protestors were taking in the form of boycotts, sit-ins, and marches, as opposed to going through the legal system (which black student activists knew would be a losing, endless, discouraging fight).

The presidents themselves were not immune to firings or punishments for not toeing the line of white supremacy, silencing any support they may have of on-campus activism, which complicates the narrative of them as purely evil demagogues. These black public colleges were “wholly dependent on state



appropriations for everything from routine building maintenance to the creation of new academic programs” which meant “public colleges could not afford—politically or financially—to alienate white legislators, the governor, or trustees” (119). As a result of white hostility towards the movement, black college presidents were forced to “accept conditional promise of increased funding if they remained outside the movement. Each president, then, vowed to keep his college open at any cost and used harsh punishment to dissuade activists from turning the campuses into movement centers” (119). In 1970, J. H. White would lose the battle to keep his school open and his students under control, but the movement arrived at Mississippi Vocational years earlier. It is then not surprising that he “retired” the following year.

### **Emmett Till & the Emergence of the Black Freedom Movement in the Delta (1955-1957)**

Even within the confines of their systemic subjugation, students and some faculty still managed to challenge the administration and the forces in charge by demanding more autonomy and more of a voice as the ones actually using the facilities on the campus. The history of activism at Mississippi Valley State is deeply entrenched and influenced by the black freedom movement of the mid-twentieth century, encompassing what are popularly referred to as the Civil Rights Movement (1954-1965), which had the primary goals of integration and black voter enfranchisement in the South, and later the Black Power Movement (1965-1972), more heavily associated with urban centers outside the Bible Belt, but no less prevalent on black campuses in Mississippi. In order to understand the student activism at Mississippi Valley during the black freedom movement, it must be analyzed in the context of the broader social movements taking place at various regional and political levels.

However rigid the commitment was to violently uphold white supremacy in the Delta, that did not stop black activists and students from the region from participating in the growing movement for black liberation. After black GIs returned home from WWII and especially following the 1954 *Brown* decision (and decades prior) Mississippians were mobilizing and responding to their widespread oppression. When Alcorn graduate, Medgar Evers, unsuccessfully applied to the University of Mississippi Law School, he was hired as

the first field secretary of the Mississippi chapter of the NAACP. His appointment increasingly radicalized local black movement centers until his assassination in 1963 by a White Citizens' Council member.

In the year following the *Brown* decision, the movement among black Southerners for civil rights only intensified. Most significant for black activists in the Delta was the lynching of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till in Money, Mississippi, less than twenty miles from Itta Bena in August 1955, which further mobilized them to action as it wracked them with terror. The young boy from Chicago was beaten, shot, and thrown into a river with a seventy-five-pound cotton gin tied to his neck with barbed wire, all for allegedly whistling at a white woman at the local grocery. His face had been so ruthlessly mutilated, it was unrecognizable. Kendi says that Till “became southern aggression’s most notorious post-*Brown* victim” (55). Till’s mother, Mamie Till Mobley, “one of the unrecognized engineers of the classical civil rights period” made the radical decision to have an open casket funeral, calling upon Americans to “come see what they did to [her] boy.” Tens of thousands lined up to do that in Chicago that September, where she made another radical decision and allowed the funeral service to be captured by *Jet*’s photographer, David Jackson. The photographs he made that day were vital to bringing awareness to the American psyche and people about the realities and dangers of being a black person in America. One image, in particular, remains etched in the mind of our collective memory:

with a stoic Mamie gazing at her murdered child’s ravaged body...forced the world to reckon with the brutality of American racism. For almost a century, African Americans were lynched with regularity and impunity. Now, thanks to a mother’s determination to expose the barbarousness of the crime, the public could no longer pretend to ignore what they couldn’t see (“Emmett Till”).

The photographs of Emmett Till’s brutalized face with the portraits of him smiling in a hat, button-up shirt, and tie, was particularly effective and powerful imagery and helped engender the civil rights movement. The juxtaposition of his images was seen at his funeral, with his portraits placed gently hung above him in the top part of the casket, as well as facing one another in the issue of *Jet*. Together, his photographs demonstrated the power of imagery to humanize those who suffer from injustice and reveal how they have the ability to encourage viewers to fight against those injustices. No black American, says

Kendi, “was the same after seeing Till’s bludgeoned face. If *Brown* gave them hope, the Till lynching packed them with rage—a hope and rage that fueled the CRM [Civil Rights Movement] over the next decade” (55). Till’s murder presumably affected those around his age the hardest “and they then turned around and kicked off a stretch of seventeen years of fresh, forceful, and oftentimes front-page civil rights and black power activism on and off campus” (55). Those activists included Anne Moody, who began high school in Centreville the week after his murder, an event she claimed introduced her to hate in her memoir, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*.

The rage felt by young black Mississippians only proliferated after the swift and succinct acquittal of his murderers. Roy Bryant, owner of Bryant’s Grocery, where the encounter between Till and Bryant’s wife, Carolyn, took place—and his half-brother, J. W. Milam, almost never bothered hiding their identity as the murderers. In 1956, the two spoke with *Look* Magazine, and confessed in gruesome detail their heinous crimes, for which they could never be charged due to double jeopardy. The rage felt by black Southerners manifested itself in the coming months into widespread organization.

### **A Student Boycott for a Student Government Association (1957)**

Student activism at Mississippi Vocational College was in full force by 1957. The campus facilities and the quality of education at MVC remained inadequate for the increased number of students, who were frustrated with the administration and wished to address their grievances with them more directly. Student leaders decided to plan an action on campus modeled after other actions performed by civil rights activists in the U.S. South. As William L. Ware describes in his short piece, “The Birth of a College Sit-In,” “students at Vocational knew the theory of peaceful demonstration and insurrection that called attention to problems. The action would be directed to the college administration but was designed to get the attention of the larger population. We knew the theory but had no prototype. We would become the model” (2), he said. Ware, whose name was included in a long list of student signatures from that year, was presumably one of the participants in the protest that year and wrote a short summary of it, included in the “student unrest” box in the archives of Mississippi Valley State today.

In February of that year, in order to “seek redress of grievances,” students decided to protest in the form of a boycott of classes. College leaders “realized that the protestors’ task would only be accomplished when others (targeted individuals, groups, or systems) saw things (issues, conditions) the way they did or saw things through the eyes of the protestors” (1). In order to “seek redress of grievances,” students decided to protest in the form of a boycott of classes. They chose to occupy the gym, primarily for its strategic location, which “would attract the most traffic” (1). Forty percent of students (approximately 160 out of 450 total) formed a picket line and went on strike for the next thirty-six hours. When they first met in the gym, the student organizers decided they would *collectively* “develop a succinct list of concerns that inhibited the educational process” at MVC. “It was readily apparent that ground rules had to be established for work sessions, approach for relating to others even when their ideas were difficult, and methods of disseminating the list of concerns” and they all agreed they would go back to class as a unit, and not until they had “sufficient opportunity to express grievances and sufficient redress ha[d] been expressed” (1).

The list of grievances students listed ranged from the behavior of professors insensitive to the academic needs of students, some of whom were verbally abusive; inadequate facilities, particularly the library and its holdings; poor campus drainage; buildings that leaked when it rained; and “little to no student involvement in decisions affecting students” (2). The *Clarion-Ledger* reported that students were demanding less restrictions, more social activities, and more facilities like ironing boards and washing machines. The primary demand of the students at Vocational, the only black college in the state without a student-run organization, was for more autonomy in the form of student government association. Until that demand was met, students declared that they would boycott class. The morning of Friday, February 20, students demonstrated on campus with signs reading “no student government, no classes,” making their demands unmistakable (“Vocational School Negroes On Strike”).

The fight for a Student Government Association (SGA) was not surprising, as it was the only black college in the state without one. Joy Ann Williamson explains:

SGAs attracted these politically minded students who sought power as well as changes to the campus regulations and climate. Though student governments most often focused on grievances against the

dress code, strict supervision of male-female contact, and lack of student representation on campus committees rather than black enfranchisement, their arguments mirrored the burgeoning black freedom struggle's demands for participatory democracy (39).

The SGA these students in 1957 fought for would ultimately become the organization leading the class boycotts in 1969 and 1970.

Dr. E. R. Jobe, executive secretary of the IHL Board, and a prominent actor in the student activism across the state and at Mississippi Valley through the black campus movement, "arrived at the scene" in Itta Bena along with two other trustees, H. G. Carpenter, the chairman from Rolling Fork, and S. R. Evans from Greenwood. Jobe, the *Clarion-Ledger's* source on the events, reported that White had received a letter the day before (Thursday, February 21) with the list of demands, and he reported that a joint student-faculty committee had already been studying the demands prior to their decision to boycott classes. That day, White invited a representative group of protestors into his office to present their grievances to him and other members of the Board of Trustees. When they entered the room, according to William L. Ware, "one could sense the hostility" and the protestors were "welcomed unceremoniously" ("The Birth of a College Sit-In" 2). They left the meeting with an understanding that changes would take place and students would be given more autonomy moving forward, ending their strike.

As Joy Ann Williamson contends, the boycott marked "the first large-scale disruptive event initiated at a black college in Mississippi during the middle twentieth century" (39); and on an even larger scope, it marked "the first massive student boycott of the civil rights era" (120). It demonstrated to the trustees and the administration that "students would take drastic steps to achieve their ends" (40) and they feared that if the students were willing to boycott for a student government, then they would be as willing to do so for civil rights. The student boycott ended after the board of trustees and President White promised to discuss the issue. However, White stalled on the issue for another four years and it was not until the 1961-1962 academic year that the administration allowed for the creation of such an organization, which remained "heavily censored" throughout White's tenure (40). Williamson asserts that though "[t]heir actions did not directly attack white supremacy... they were influenced by the increasingly aggressive nature with which blacks

advanced their grievances in the immediate post-*Brown* era and the boycott tactics popularized in the Montgomery Bus Boycott, resolved only two months earlier” (40).

Although the IHL Board, the state of Mississippi, and the college all happily accepted the way in which mainstream media outlets described the interaction as a positive and biracial exchange, documents from the Sovereignty Commission reveal how the student government was seen as a perceived threat to existing white supremacist structures. On March 14, 1957, Hal C. DeCell, the Sovereignty Commission’s public relations director, wrote a memo to Ney M. Gore, Jr., then-director of the Commission, with the subject listed as “Student Strike at M.V.C.” DeCell wrote to bring to his attention a recent issue in *Jet*, “in which they stated in a featured story that the reason for the strike was because the students disagreed with what they termed Dr. White’s ‘Uncle Tom attitude.’” Students also disagreed with White’s “public statements favorable to the state of Mississippi.” The Commission, demonstrated in this memo, used the *Jet* article as “further proof” (as there was a note instructing “see earlier report”) that “outside interest” (i.e., “outside agitators”) are what actually “instigated” the boycott of classes at Mississippi Vocational College (“Student Strike at M.V.C.,” SCR ID #3-0A-1-4-1-1-1). The memo also offers evidence that students, as early as 1957, thought of J. H. White as an Uncle Tom, as someone that worked too closely with the suits in power, and someone who spoke about Mississippi in ways they didn’t believe. All of those musings were red flags to the Sovereignty Commission, who were monitoring black publications, colleges, students, and beyond as a growing, state-sanctioned surveillance force.

Considering the racist watchdog institutions that persisted in the Delta, such as the Sovereignty Commission, the White Citizens’ Council, the KKK, among others “[t]he student boycotts at Mississippi Vocational and Alcorn were extremely radical, particularly since they attended institutions under the thumb of racist white legislators and trustees, and sanctions, expulsions, and death threats occurred regularly” (Williamson 61). Unlike at Jackson State, the geographic location of MVC and Alcorn made student participation in the movement that much harder (119). Even though Valley was close to Greenwood, which had movement centers like RCNL [Regional Council of Negro Leadership], SNCC, NAACP, and activist

churches, it was located in the Delta, where white repression was most intense. Therefore, the difficulties faced by student activists at MVC made their activism that much more radical.

In September of 1957, nine black students bravely integrated Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, where they were confronted by an angry white mob of protestors. The country's first desegregation of a legally segregated public high school was terrible news for the white supremacist power structure in Mississippi. Earlier that year, before the Little Rock Nine changed the course of American history, students at Mississippi Vocational College organized the first mass student boycott in the state. The desegregation of Central High School and the boycott of students at Mississippi Vocational amplified the terror among the white supremacist state in Mississippi, and in response, the state increased the terror they inflicted on those trying to undermine their power and the racial hierarchy.

### **The Mississippi Struggle for Civil Rights (1957-1964)**

White Mississippians felt shocked by the organizing power of the black students and their ability to pull off a boycott. However, that was not enough to radically shift power at Mississippi Vocational College. The 1960s would be a transformative decade for organizing across Mississippi. In 1961, four years after they presented their demands, students at Vocational finally got their Student Government Association. This was the same year SNCC [the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee] arrived in Mississippi (Williamson 8). The organization formed just weeks after black students held sit-ins at a whites-only Woolworth's counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. The students established SNCC to spearhead desegregation and voter registration in the South. Soon after their arrival in the Mississippi, SNCC members discovered it was a "primary target for civil rights activity because of the intensity of white resistance in the state" (8). SNCC encouraged more student activism and helped build the broader movement in the state.

Also in 1961, the Freedom Riders, an interracial group sponsored by CORE (Congress of Racial Equality), traveled across the South to test the Supreme Court decision, *Boynton v. Virginia*, and the Interstate Commerce Act, "which forbade discrimination in interstate transportation" (36). Stokely Carmichael, who was attending Howard University at the time, was one of the students that boarded a bus and rode it through

the South. On the trip, the buses were often confronted by vicious white mobs, potentially fatal attacks, and arresting police, sending some riders to Parchman. Later that year, nine students from Tougaloo College “inaugurated a period of sustained and massive civil disobedience across the state” after they staged a sit-in at the whites-only public library in Jackson and were subsequently arrested (37). By 1962, James Meredith successfully desegregated the University of Mississippi, the flagship public university in the second to last state still holding out on segregation (Alabama would be last after being forced by the National Guard, ending Governor George Wallace’s blockade in June 1963). Mississippi’s integration only came about in response to a federal court order, and riots instigated by segregationists broke out on campus, resulting in the death of two white men and injuring over three hundred people.

Mississippi activists faced a particularly bloody and violent year in 1963, furthering the shift toward black power and re-defining their goals past integration and toward actual empowerment. Fannie Lou Hamer, Annell Ponder, Euvestor Simpson, and Laurence Guyot were severely beaten in a Winona jail by police officers on their way home from a voter registration training workshop (51). Tougaloo students including Anne Moody, famed author of *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, held a sit-in at a whites-only Woolworth’s lunch counter, which turned violent at the hands of the white mob who attacked them verbally, physically, and pelted them with condiments and salt, pepper, and sugar, for hours until they were taken to safety. Two weeks later, the beloved and powerful field secretary for the NAACP Mississippi chapter, Medgar Evers, was shot down in cold blood outside his home in Jackson by White Citizens’ Council member and former KKK member, Byron De La Beckwith (51). The murder of Evers “added particularly horrific punctuation to the violence. For Mississippi activists, racists had gunned down the most prominent freedom fighter in the state, a well-known and beloved man revered for his bravery” (51). Meanwhile, the mainstream news outlets in the state claimed the “professional agitators of the NAACP, CORE, and the SCLC must share some of the guilt,” (51) to the horror and indignation of black activists everywhere.

In August 1964, Fannie Lou Hamer spoke at the Democratic National Convention, as a representative of the newly created Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). In the summer of 1964 was an active period in the struggle. That August 1964, Fannie Lou Hamer spoke at the



Democratic National Convention, as a representative of the newly created Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). The party was created as a challenge to the absence of black representation in the Mississippi Democratic Party. In a nationally televised speech before the Credentials Committee, Hamer detailed the story of the brutal beating she took in that Winona jail, all because she attempted to register black voters. Her words shed light on the Mississippi struggle to a national audience.

### **Freedom School to Free Speech Movement**

The Freedom Summer project also helped “catapult” the fight taking place in Mississippi to the national consciousness. Launched by SNCC and COFO (Council of Federated Organizations), the project brought “hundreds of mainly white volunteers to Mississippi” (8). They registered and helped educate black voters, as well as black children in both traditional school subjects and the movement. This prolonged effort brought a lot of necessary attention to the “horrid political, economic, educational, and social conditions in the state and catapulted the Mississippi movement into the national consciousness” (8). During the 1964 Freedom Summer, many of the northern white idealist students became radicalized having seen the conditions in Mississippi and when they returned to their colleges outside of the South, they took that radical spirit with them.

One of the students who traveled to Mississippi was Mario Savio, a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley, who helped register voters and taught at a Freedom School in McComb. He saw the brutality of white supremacy firsthand that summer, and after being physically attacked in Jackson while walking with another white activist and their black acquaintance, he became further radicalized to fight against the violence he witnessed and experienced.

Savio brought his newly formed radical spirit back to northern California that fall, where he planned to continue to raise funds for SNCC, only to find out the university banned all political activity and fundraising on school grounds (Ashenmiller).

After the police arrested another graduate student, Jack Weinberg, for violating the prohibition after he manned a table for CORE, student at Berkeley spontaneously held a thirty-hour sit-in surrounding the police car Weinberg was detained inside. Savio gave an inspiring speech from atop a police car and rallied the crowd, which at that moment he became the *de facto* spokesman for this Free Speech Movement at Berkeley (Ashenmiller). The entire movement at Berkeley came about because of Savio's dedication to continuing the work he did that summer teaching and organizing in Mississippi. One of the iconic moments of American student activism is the front of four thousand people, Savio gave his famous "bodies upon the gears" speech, in which he urged students to throw their bodies into the machine's gears in order to stop it (Jackman). He exclaimed:

There's a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part! You can't even passively take part! And you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels...upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop! And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all! (qtd. in Jackman).

His speech welcomed a new era of radical, massive student activism at Berkeley, now comfortably known as being one of the most politically active campuses in the world. Students were willing to shut down their entire schools, like laborers were willing to shut down entire workplaces, if their administrative leaders were not going to meet their needs and demands.

After Savio's speech atop a police car, the spokesman of the newly inaugurated Free Speech Movement, along with 800 others, was arrested for occupying Sproul Hall overnight, in what remains the *second* largest mass arrest on a campus in U.S. history. He was expelled and sentenced to 120 days in jail. Years later, reflecting back on the movement, Savio said "For us it was a question: *Whose side are you on?* Are we on the side of the civil rights movement? Or have we now gotten back to the comfort and security of

Berkeley, California, and can we forget the sharecroppers whom we worked with just a few weeks before? Well, we couldn't forget" (qtd. in Barker). It was not the beatniks, or the progressivism so heavily associated with Berkeley that mobilized a new movement on the elite campus up north. time spent in Mississippi, his political activism that he learned and taught in freedom schools, experiencing the wrath of violent white racists himself, and

While Savio was unable to forget the sharecroppers in Mississippi, most people give them no mention when they discuss the Free Speech Movement and the beginning of nearly a decade of widespread student-led protests across the country. The "comfort and security" allotted to the predominately white, privileged students in Berkeley, California, seemed granted to the black students at Mississippi Valley State. That did not mean students in Mississippi were unwilling to continue to fight for improved rights, especially as the Black Campus Movement began to take shape the following year, 1965.

The reality is that black students were protesting Mississippi's specific brand of free speech suppression on their own campuses. In 1964, the battle "became more heated as activists in the state accelerated their attacks on Mississippi's power structure," writes Joy Ann Williamson in her work, *Jim Crow Campus: Higher Education and the Struggle for a New Southern Social Order*, published in 2018 (loc 1141). Bans against guest speakers on campus were enacted by state legislators in 1956 and, in 1964, were reaffirmed in as a continued necessity. "to protect their campuses from the 'invasion' of the state by Freedom Summer workers who, in the minds of some legislators, intended to overthrow the American government" Speaker bans in the Deep South stemmed from the fanatical, outlandish anti-communist sentiments that grew across the country during the early years of the Cold War, but were further strengthened and broadened by "linking their battle against communist to their battle against the black freedom struggle in the 1960s" (loc 1038). According to William Billingsley, they "serviced the political needs of a moribund order at a time of crisis. Racialist ideology and segregation were finished, but anticommunism remained vital as protection against perceived threats to the social order" (qtd. in Williamson-Lott loc 1038). To the white supremacist state, communism and integration represented the same threat their racial caste system (loc 1038).

The stakes for black students standing up to white supremacist power structures were high and the consequences were severe. Understanding that suggests that history owes more credit to those that did and enthusiastically fought to do that in Mississippi in the years after 1964. The work of black activists in Mississippi helped spur and shape the Free Speech Movement in Berkeley, as well as other subsequent liberation movements; though their role has largely been erased.

### **The Rise of Black Power at Mississippi Valley State College (1965-1968)**

By the mid-1960s, it was clear that the fight for integration and voting rights could not be the end goal of the black freedom movement, as organizers became increasingly frustrated and tired of working towards freedom that seemingly existed for their counterparts outside the South while they remained under the hold of white supremacy. Black organizers in the South saw that even with *de jure* segregation outlawed, and with the numbers of registered black voters on the rise, the violence persisted.

In February 1965, the controversial black nationalist leader, Malcolm X, was assassinated while addressing a crowd on a stage in New York City. In March of that year, the broadcast of horrifying footage of voting rights marchers enduring brutal police violence as they tried to cross the Edmund Pettus bridge in Selma, Alabama would lock into the nation's collective shame. By August, when the Watts Rebellion erupted in Los Angeles, it was clear that black activists, particularly the younger ones, were becoming increasingly more fed up with non-violent strategies that were not resulting in any meaningful gains. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were still not enough to liberate black Americans, nor was trying to appeal to the sensibilities of white Americans, whose power continued to inflict irretrievable harm.

The Black Power Movement has its roots in the rural Mississippi Delta, though it is predominantly associated with urban hubs, such as Oakland, where the revolutionary Marxist-Leninist Black Panther Party was formed by college students Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale in October 1966. In 1969, infamous FBI

Director J. Edgar Hoover said the organization “without question, represents the greatest threat to the internal security of the country” (“Hoover Calls Panthers Top Threat to Security”). He claimed the group was responsible for violence against police officers and leaders preached “their gospel of hate and violence, not only to ghetto residents, but to students in colleges and high schools as well.” He also claimed student unrest on campuses across the nation resulted in more than \$3 million in damage to buildings and over four thousand arrests (“Hoover...”).

The Black Power Movement was in fact inaugurated in Greenwood, Mississippi in June 1966 during James Meredith’s March on Fear. Meredith, the same man credited with desegregating the University of Mississippi in 1962, organized a solo march from Memphis, Tennessee to Jackson, Mississippi, a distance of about 220 miles, making a point to walk through a region known for its extensive record of racist violence, usually supported by the state. It was his goal to encourage voter registration by proving “that a black man could walk safely through the state of Mississippi” (Williamson 134). Meredith was shot just on the second day of his march in Hernando, near the Tennessee-Mississippi border, by a man named Aubrey James Norvell, an unemployed hardware clerk from Memphis. Norvell was apprehended shortly thereafter and went on to serve eighteen months of a five-year sentence at Parchman for assault and battery with intent to kill, before moving back to the Memphis area, where he remained until at least 2014 (Gill).

For many, the March Against Fear was “the last straw” (Williamson 134). As Williamson explains, “As with the 1963 murder of Medgar Evers, the assault represented one line in a long chain of murders and attempted murders of activists and provided a vivid reminder that the racial hierarchy bred not only segregation but rabid hate and violence.” She continues, “Adding insult to literal injury, the white press’s treatment of the incident further inflamed tensions. The *Jackson Daily News*, for instance, dismissed the shooting as part of a conspiracy to tarnish Mississippi’s reputation, and implicated Dr. King for precipitating the event” (135). The weaponization of the press by the state was nothing new and the Sovereignty Commission and the state legislature.

Stokely Carmichael, a Trinidadian-born chairman of SNCC, was a particularly involved civil rights activist throughout the movement. He had spent his summers in the Deep South since 1961 when he joined

the Freedom Riders. After finishing at Howard University, he turned down an acceptance from Harvard for graduate school. He continued to work diligently to register black voters and demand integration in Alabama and Mississippi. When Meredith was shot on the second day of his “March Against Fear” in June 1966, Carmichael joined, along with Dr. King, and continued the 200-mile walk to the capital.

On the only day Dr. King was absent in the nearly three weeks of March Against Fear (he flew out to Chicago to help organize marches for the Open Housing Movement), Carmichael was arrested in Greenwood, Mississippi. He and the marchers had arrived at Stone Street Negro Elementary School to set up camp and were arrested for trespassing on public property. After he was held for a few hours, Carmichael reunited with the marchers who had moved to a local park in Greenwood and were holding an evening rally, about 10 miles from the MVC campus in Itta Bena. When Carmichael took the stage, he was enraged following his arrest and his increasing disillusionment with nonviolent approaches the movement relied on as the violence experienced by black people around the world at the hands of whites, had reached a head. He rallied the crowd with the cry “We want Black Power!” and by using it for the first time in this public forum, entered “Black Power” into the American lexicon (“Black Power”).

One of the people in the crowd listening to Carmichael’s call for “Black Power” was another fellow Trinidadian-born black activist in Mississippi, Wilhelm Joseph, Jr. Joseph was a student on an athletic scholarship at Mississippi Valley State College (MVSC), formerly Mississippi Vocational College. The college formally changed its name in 1964, when they were authorized to offer liberal arts degrees, as well as degrees in education and science (Brooks and Starks). Wilhelm Joseph was known for his exceptional intelligence, athleticism, and widespread activism in the community. He was “radically moved” by the slogan, which made him say, “I’m going to do something about this” (qtd. in Williamson 139).

The two Trinidadian immigrants spoke after his speech. Stokely Carmichael asked Wilhelm Joseph if he would approach President White “about the possibility of marchers using college facilities to change clothes, shower, and rest” (140). When Joseph asked, he was notified that White had called the National Guard “to prevent the marchers from having anything to do with the college” (140). He did not understand: “But it’s a *black* college! Something is wrong here” (qtd. in Williamson 140). Dr. White’s refusal to assist or

provide any basic resources for the black men and women marching in solidarity with James Meredith disgusted Wilhelm Joseph. After that, Joseph “came to believe that the school itself was part of the problem, perpetuating an oppression of the mind, if not the body” (Shephard 204). From that moment on, he was dedicated to making his school and his community better for the black people living there.

Joseph brought student activism at Mississippi Valley to another level—the level of Black Power. He successfully ran for student body president on a ticket boasting “We are going to move this place! This is a *black* college. We are going to use this opportunity to teach folks about black independence. We are going to broaden the vision” (qtd. in Williamson 140). Joseph, the catalyst for the student movement, broadened the vision of what this black college in the Delta could and should be—not a vocational school training black young men and women to compromise and demur to the powers of a racist power structure.

### **The Assassination of MLK & Radicalism at Valley (1968)**

In 1968, student activism across the globe had become so widespread and movements for social change became increasingly radical everywhere. Activists at Valley were embracing the movement for black power, dedicating their time to organizing, and becoming more radical themselves due to forces both internally, within the confines of the college, and externally, where the world around them was in a constant state of unrest. Students in America were fighting against many battles in the late 1960s: the Vietnam War, the draft, the assassination of the civil rights hero, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the 1968 presidential race between Richard Nixon, Hubert Humphrey, and George Wallace to name a few. In Mississippi, desegregation had not yet been abolished and public education was still far from equal. Many Mississippians were still fighting to integrate their public schools, even if the world beyond Mississippi or the South, was ready to move on from that particular struggle.

The specific brand of radicalism at Mississippi Valley State College really came to the surface beginning in 1968. In January, the college, which had an enrollment of about 2,400 students by then (“Discuss Upgrading Of Delta Negro Education”), organized a ceremony for the grand opening of a new cafeteria opening on campus. The cafeteria at Valley was going to bear the name of H. M. Ivy, former

president of the IHL Board and longtime “friend” to J. H. White and the college. The IHL Board has the sole power of naming the buildings on each public college and university campuses in Mississippi. The public invitation they published in the papers said they wanted to thank him for his “devotion” and continued, “our further hope that his name will make the ideal of his services perpetuated as an inspiration to generations of our students throughout subsequent history as they walk through the building” (“MVSC Getting Ready For Dedicatory Services”). On January 11, 1968,<sup>3</sup> Ivy delivered a speech in the H. G. Carpenter Auditorium (named after a different powerful white board member) as part of the ceremony. In his speech, Ivy reportedly called the audience of young black students and staff members the “n-word” repeatedly. The students in the audience were outraged and when they attempted to leave, the security guards kept them from doing so. This widened the gap in between administrators and students further. When students organized in 1970, they remembered this incident, reflected in their demand to have control over the naming of buildings.

The last straw, if it wasn’t the shooting of James Meredith (or any number of violent racially charged tragedies), was the killing of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis. On April 4, 1968, he was shot from his balcony at the Lorraine Hotel, who came to the city to support the 1,200 striking black sanitation workers. With Memphis being only a two-hour drive from Valley’s campus, the students there were very affected by the news of his death. That evening, about three hundred students organized a “Sympathy March” on campus, where they held a memorial for Dr. King (“Greenwood Negroes In Peaceful March”). Highway Patrol were quickly on the scene, which escalated the entire situation, and then subsequently caused violence to erupt. The brunt of the violence was only experienced by the students though, two in particular, while the patrolmen and their cars remained untouched. Two students were shot by Highway Patrolmen after they “joined in a march from the campus towards the small town of Itta Bena” (“Greenwood...”). Robert Flowers of Montgomery, Alabama was shot in his right leg and James Cooper was shot in his left leg and

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<sup>3</sup> This date comes from two newspaper articles published in the *Clarion-Ledger* and the *Greenwood Commonwealth*. Both articles only announce the dedication ceremony, they do not discuss what happened during the event. Floyd Bailey, James McBride, and Eddie Carthan, three of the people I interviewed, all assert that it was this event that led to the unrest in 1970. The two-year gap in between this and the 1970 boycott is an inconsistency in the narrative, which should be noted, but not so much to dismiss entirely. More of their perspective is offered in Chapter Three.



thigh before being admitted to Greenwood Leflore Hospital. J. H. White requested that the officers leave the campus and admitted that the “friends” of the college could sometimes cause more harm than good to the students he was responsible for keeping safe. Instead, White requested that they take care of the issue internally, as they had before, with their own armed guards, which they had a force of on the campus. The patrol completely ignored his request and the following day, there were still ten units on duty (“Greenwood...”).

The story told by the United Press International (UPI), a competitor of the Associated Press (AP), and then distributed to papers across the country claimed the two young men were shot “following a brick throwing demonstration.” On April 5, the *Casper Star-Tribune* out of Casper, Wyoming published the UPI piece, “Bands of Negroes Burn and Loot in Dozen U.S. Cities,” which claimed the highway patrol troopers attempted to “turn a crowd of about 300 Negroes armed with bricks, bottles and pieces of wood.” The *Clarion-Ledger* reported that the officers fired shots when they were attempting to halt the students “who filed upon the officers” (“Greenwood...”), without making clear what they meant by “file upon,” and with no mention of violent students.

The morning after King’s assassination on April 5, over one thousand black folks, mainly teenagers, gathered to march in Greenwood to the Leflore County Courthouse to hold memorial services for Dr. King. At Valley, three hundred students again gathered in a “sympathy march” as White called it. They were stopped by Highway Patrol at the gate when they tried to march the two miles to Itta Bena. In a statement issued by President White, he emphasized “four outstanding student leaders, Selvey Swanson, Andrew Smith, Charles Barron and Wilhelm Joseph who calmed students on the campus and prevented any disorder” (Biggers, “Negroes Are Allowed To Demonstrate Here”).

The assassination of Dr. King and the subsequent demonstrations taking over the country was really unfortunate timing for Dr. White and his plans for Founder’s Day that year. He said “This is happening at a time when our school is in the happiest moment of our 18-year history,” he explained. The following week the Southern School Accreditation Committee (SACS) was coming to visit. He continued, “It is just so unfortunate that this tragedy had to come at a time when we were to share out happiest moment” (qtd. in

Biggers, “Negroes...”). In spite of the tragedy and national uprising going on around them Mississippi Valley State College became fully accredited in 1968.

In addition to everything else, the national presidential election was at the minds of all the college students around the country, including those at Valley. In December 1968, a Trinidadian athlete, Michael Wilson, had his scholarship revoked after attending a Humphrey-Muskie presidential rally off-campus. The IHL Board had banned all speakers on the campus, so they had to leave the campus to hear the candidates speak or participate in civic engagement as voter-age, draft-age citizens. Wilson claimed taking away his scholarship was equivalent to expulsion, and brought the matter to federal court. White said the scholarship was suspended not because Wilson attended the rally, but because “he has intimidated other students who were attending classes and did not wish to attend the rally” (Biggers, “Student Sues for Scholarship”). White, who had helped grow the student population to nearly 2,500, continued:

I think it is reaching a sad situation when schools and colleges cannot say to whom they wish a scholarship to go and cannot have a say in the conduct and manner in which a school campus is to be governed. We are under the rules of the Board of Trustees of Higher Education. Unfortunately, it has reached this bad shape, and it is a said situation in the field of education (qtd. in Biggers, “Student Sues”).

White then explained that he was going to meet with the IHL Board who would appoint an attorney to the college.

On December 17, 1968, U.S. District Judge Orma Smith ruled that Michael Wilson has been denied due process and ordered Mississippi Valley to reinstate his scholarship. In handing down the ruling, he said “A student cannot be arbitrarily dismissed without receiving fair and fundamental due process” (“Government Orders Student Reinstated”). Rescinding a scholarship to Michael Wilson was part of the attempts to quell the rising radical student activism momentum on the Mississippi Valley State campus. Wilson’s scholarship remained intact for the following year, his senior year, during which he continued his activism alongside Student Government Association President, Wilhelm Joseph.

### Wilhelm Joseph & The Renewal of the Class Strike

Ibram X. Kendi calls 1969 the “apex” of the Black Campus Movement. SGA President, Wilhelm Joseph, led another protest that February—and Black Power’s centrality was evident. A list of twenty-six demands were delivered to the Administrative Council and college officials on Thursday, February 6, 1969. Some of the prime examples of the demands they offered included: more emphasis on academics and less on discipline; more and better qualified instructors; more and better campus speakers; a sound remedial learning program; better facilities; more studies in Negro history, culture, and art; recognition of Negro campus organizations; approval of Afro-American fashions; extension of curfew hours for girls (“MVSC students stage sit-in...”).

After they presented their demands to the school, they were told they would receive a response the next day, Friday, February 7. When students did not receive a response, nearly six hundred students stayed behind in the auditorium after a movie and staged an all-night sit-in promising to demonstrate and possibly boycott classes until their demands were met. Vice President O. P. Lowe said that students just left at 6 a.m. with the issues still unresolved. J. H. White commented that most of the demands were already being met by the school or were in the process of being met (“MVSC students stage sit-in...”).

Saturday evening, February 8, another peaceful sit-in was staged in the gym. Six hours into their demonstration, around 2 a.m., fifty Highway Patrol officers, ten Leflore County Sheriff’s deputies, and campus security police, all equipped with riot gear, surrounded the building. School officials had called for police backup, even though the sit-in that evening in the gym was quieter than the one in the auditorium the night earlier. They stormed the gym and forcibly removed 196 students saying they were “temporarily suspended” and transported them to the bus station in Jackson. From Jackson, they were told to go home. Leflore County Sheriff John Arterbury said he told the students they could either go home or go to jail (“Demonstrators”). President White said, “We merely sent the students home after the second demonstration. They can write for readmission after forty days. But that doesn’t mean we’ll take them back,” (“Demonstrators”). Fifteen others were imprisoned at the Leflore County Jail, including Charles

Barron who the year before, White was praising for helping keep the demonstration safe following Dr. King's murder, and a warrant was issued for the arrest of the sit-in's four student leaders, including Joseph (Kendi, introduction, n.p.). President White suspended all of the offending students, over 200, and allowed most, but not all, to enroll again after presenting their case at hearings before the Administrative Council. (Williamson 140).

Jane Biggers, the local journalist who would later be exposed by 1970 SGA President Tyrone Gettis as working for the Sovereignty Commission and actively misreporting on their struggle, wrote a piece for the *Clarion-Ledger* calling their peaceful sit in a "Love-In." She wrote in her piece, "Police End MVS Love-In," that the police:

broke up a "love-in" being held at the school gym during the pre-dawn hours Sunday. The additional police support was called in by the school president, Dr. J. H. White, after a number of students began breaking windows and tearing down doors following a campus dance. Under orders from the school president 196 students were sent home from the campus on chartered buses. Fifteen others were arrested and are being held in Leflore County jail on charges of disorderly conduct and-or malicious mischief.

Dr. White explained he had requested addition[al] police protection because "I need to protect this fine campus and the hundreds of other students who were not involved in any of this." The "love-in" began after midnight when boys and girls began pulling out mattresses and bedding stored beneath the bleachers for athletes who stay overnight on the campus for sports events. Some of the boys in the adjacent men's dormitory had started breaking the windows and kicking down the doors. Biggers' hyper-sexualization of these black students and the implicit assumptions of mindless vandalism utilizes the language of the oppressor to marginalize, discredit, and repress the dissenting party. As a staff writer for the *Clarion-Ledger*, Biggers, who had been a staff writer at the *Greenwood Commonwealth* the year before, had a noticeably different style and sense of urgency in her writing, now that it was attached the white supremacist police state. In an article published two days later in the *Clarion-Ledger*, Dr. White made it clear that he knew nothing of the a reported 'Love-In.' He said, "First, I know nothing of the information or its

source” (“College Agrees to 10 of 18...”). Students activists “objected to the terms used in a newspaper on the basis that it implied a sex affair. On the contrary the students say they loved the school and sit-in was in affection for their school” (“College Agrees to 10 Of 18 Demands...”).

The fifteen students who were arrested were all released by Sunday night. After the police raid of the gym, student leaders planned a boycott to protest the unlawful, unnecessary arrests of fifteen and “temporary expulsion” of another 198 students. On Monday, nearly eight hundred students entered the administration building to get school withdrawal forms. Students were planning a walkout by Tuesday at noon if their demands were not met in their entirety (“Boycott said successful at Mississippi Valley”). That Monday, February 10, Governor John Bell Williams flew into Greenwood from Jackson to visit J. H. White on Valley’s campus (“MVSC Softens...”). Williams left before Charles Evers, Mississippi’s NAACP field secretary, arrived at Jennings Chapel, a black church, to speak. Evers told the group of about six hundred listeners to keep boycotting, but avoid vandalism and he told adults to “go to the college and tell White ‘he’s got to go’” (MVSC Softens...”).

In the very early hours of Tuesday, February 11, students leaders called off the class boycott they had scheduled for that day after leaving a meeting with college officials in which they tried to reach an agreement about the demands. The students left the meeting thinking the administration agreed to all of the demands, but White released a statement saying he agreed to “a majority” of them not all. The demands not met according to the list were:

1. “Administration must encourage, not discourage, Afro-American styles
2. A special section in the library for all-Negro writers, and Black literature.
3. The administration must agree to allow all black organizations on campus, including NAACP, CORE, SNCC and the Black Panthers.
4. Let girls have access to the outside world, extension of girls curfew rules.
5. Student representation on all policy makings regarding the campus.
6. Student participation in total activity fee contribution
7. A budget for a student newspaper.

8. Extension of female curfew hours from 10 p.m. to 1 a.m.”

(“MVSC Head Urges Boycotters ‘Cool It’).

The demands they were unwilling to compromise on were designed to be empowering to their black race and the black students that attended MVSC. The sexist 10 p.m. curfew for women and requiring women have permission to leave campus tended to be the policies White was most dedicated to implementing.

The boycott was officially planned for Wednesday, February 12. Vice President O. P. Lowe reported that about ninety percent of the study body was missing from classes, making it an almost totally effective boycott (“MVSC students launch...”). That evening, civil rights pioneer, Fannie Lou Hamer, from Ruleville, spoke to a crowd in Itta Bena. Speaking to a peaceful rally with nearly 1,400 attendants in the tiny town of Itta Bena. She assured the students if the president continued not to budge and their demands remained unmet, she would bring Dick Gregory, a comedian and civil rights leader who visited more college campuses than anyone, and Representative Julian Bond from Georgia. She added, “The time is out for the kind of compromising we have had to do for the last 350 years” (“Fannie Lou...”). After her speech, students spent the night in the gym

On Thursday, February 13, the dismissed students started returning to campus. In a move clearly designed to limit dissent and organizing, White issued a memo early that day reminding students that those who don’t follow the rules, will be forced to leave. It also instructed the students that the administration would be prohibiting any further use of campus buildings for mass meetings, in a directly opposition fashion to social change (“Fannie Lou Hamer backs boycott”). That evening, about five to six hundred students, according to J. H. White, gathered outside his home, “Friendship Manor.” In order to preserve the school, he decided to open up negotiations once again. An accord of ten students and ten faculty meet around 11 p.m. and stayed in session until about 6 a.m. Friday. The students ignored the building rule and held an all-night vigil in the gym anyway (Boyd, “Student-faculty...”). After hours of deliberation, the boycott was called out because of the work put in between students and faculty, in spite of the college president.

Ten of the students expelled from MVSC, including Wilhelm Joseph, filed a suit in court claiming “they were singled out for arrests or expulsions because they ‘are regarded as leaders of the students’ by J. H.

White” (“MVSC students file suit in US Court”). U. S. District Judge Orma Smith, who assisted Michael Wilson the year before, ordered that the ten students be re-instated immediately. (“MVSC students file...”).

Wilhelm Joseph’s radicalism was clearly very nerve-racking for both racist whites and accommodationist blacks. He caused a great stir to many because his activism went beyond the campus. Joseph got very involved in the surrounding communities in the Delta. He was actively being observed by Sovereignty Commission spies and informants—documenting when he would go to Marks in Quitman County among others. Two days before his graduation, Joseph was en route to a protest in Marks, when he was arrested (Shepherd 204). His arrest came after Governor John Bell Williams asked Mississippi Senator James Eastland for help deporting him. All of those working against him were unsuccessful because Joseph’s strength and care for Mississippi was evident, unlike with J. H. White.

### **Conclusion**

Wilhelm Joseph did not get deported or expelled, like the institution and the state may have preferred, but graduated from Mississippi Valley State College in 1969 and prepared for law school at the University of Mississippi. The actions of Joseph and those that came before him at Valley and beyond were all building up to the actions that would take place the following year. The tensions had not disappeared, nor did they diminish. Quite the contrary was true. The year 1970 led to the closing of Valley temporarily, which is everything J. H. White wanted to prevent from occurring.

White, who defended his actions until the very end and believed everything he did was for the benefit of all Mississippians, black and white. By July 1971, he retired, being replaced by E. A. Boykins. In 1973, the Sovereignty Commission disbanded as their function became the target of liberal and radical students of the era across college campuses, historically white and black, throughout the State. In a 1968 issue of the *Reflector*, the student newspaper at Mississippi State University, David P. “Pat” Coughlin wrote an article entitled “Sovereignty Commission Promotes Bigotry.” He began saying, “I have known for some time that the Sovereignty Commission existed for the purpose of defending the Fascist, reactionary power structure which rules the State of Mississippi” and he went on to denounce its “police state tactics” (216).

While fears of communism and racial equality still plague Mississippi and its college campuses and work to silence radical young activists with visions of changing their campus, their state, and the world beyond them are often left out of the historical narrative, radicalism has always been a part of the Mississippi's story. While the rigid conditions are exactly what radicalizes so many activists who come here—including Mario Savio, Stokely Carmichael, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Fannie Lou Hamer, and the students at Mississippi Valley in 1969-1970—it is also that rigidity that works so hard to silence radical voices and actions. With the help of organizations like the Sovereignty Commission and the White Citizens' Council and people like James H. White, the State worked as effectively as any in erasing their narratives. In the next chapter, I will dissect some of the first-person narratives collected from students that attended Mississippi Valley in 1969-1970 and participated in the radical student activism there, whose voices are missing from the public narrative.



CHAPTER TWO:  
THE “TTTA BENA 894”

The tension between administrators and activists at Mississippi Valley State College increasingly built up during the last two years of the 1960s. With rising tension came more student-led organizing and more powerful collective actions, culminating in the largest mass arrest in U.S. history on February 11, 1970. This chapter offers a chronological, presumably factual account of the “unrest” in early 1970 and the subsequent legal outcomes decided later in the year. The majority of information comes from a report, “Construction of Events Leading to the Closing of Mississippi Valley State College On February 11 1970,” published by the college administration. Throughout the report, the administration’s point of view and biases in support of the white power structure are evident. The foreword by Dr. White claims the report has three aims: first, to give an account of the student unrest from January 9, 1970 to February 11, 1970; second, “to show how *outside agitation* was definite[ly] a reason for part of the unrest and how the administration tried to solve it”; and third, “to give various statements from the Student Government Association officers which proves no administration can communicate with students when they are *belligerent, disrespectful, overbearing, and arrogant*” (emphasis added). Before signing his signature to it, he concludes his one-page foreword by reminding readers, “this administration goes on record now and for the future, ‘the students cannot operate the College’” (original underlining).

The report was published on February 14, during the short period of school closure, while students were in Greenwood working with legal counsel, and presumably the report was written with their primary audience assumed to be the Board of Trustees of the Institution of Higher Learning (IHL Board) and any legal counsel they would provide the college. The report is written chronologically, though interspersed throughout the nearly eighty pages of text are eighteen “exhibits” they provide as evidence, which include

memorandums written by the administration, as well as statements released by the Student Government Association (SGA). There are a number of holes in the document's narrative, including exhibit six, which will be detailed further in this chapter. The report also includes transcripts of speeches given by Fannie Lou Hamer and student body president, Tyrone Gettis, in the days leading up to the student-led boycott of classes. These are invaluable pieces of evidence and are the only documents that offer the voices of students and their most avid supporters, like Ms. Hamer. The speeches were transcribed by someone presumably working for the Sovereignty Commission (or indirectly working for them through Dr. White). The "exhibits" included in the report do not have page numbers, and of the eighty or so pages of text, twenty are numbered. The speeches have their own page numbers within the report and exhibits are labeled by number.

This account begins where the published report claims the unrest all began—at a January 9<sup>th</sup> Administrative Council meeting where the Student Government Association (SGA) first delivered their demands to the administration. This account also relies on newspaper articles from local, state, and national outlets, and emphasis is put on articles that amplify student voices. Kenneth Fairly and Ray Pope, LEAA representatives from Mississippi and Atlanta respectively, also wrote accounts of the unrest at Valley and their role in the mass arrest of students. More important than any published account are the oral histories of former students, described in the next chapter. They are more reliable and more accurate than the college's report in illuminating the actual events which lead to the closing of the Mississippi Valley State College and mass arrest of its students in February 1970.

### **The Demands (January 1970)**

A month before the first arrests on campus would take place, on the evening of January 9, 1970, student body president Tyrone Gettis, delivered a list of thirty demands to the Administrative Council, a group comprised of eleven faculty and administrative officials appointed by J. H. White. Gettis, accompanied by the board of the SGA and one of their faculty advisors, Dr. Thomas Quaynor, began his presentation asserting that the demands he was about to read, "we consider are just and fall within the realm of justifiable complaints" and urged the administration to give them the immediate attention they deserve (Exhibit Two).

“Exhibit One” of the report is the numbered list of thirty demands (see Appendix A) and “Exhibit Two” is the list of demands with more background and reasoning, both of which were documents written and distributed by the SGA.

A major area of concern for the students was the need for more and better qualified employees. They demanded a full-time physician, considering someone had to go to Greenwood if they needed anything beyond basic medical attention, as well as recruitment of well-qualified, full-time instructors. Those on the faculty that had reached “retirement age” and those “with mental incapacitation” they demanded be released (Exhibit One). They also called for a Dean of Students, as well as additional janitorial and maid personnel.

The list of thirty demands ranged over a number of areas of concern that went beyond the faculty and staff. Many responded to monetary policies, including: SGA control over the student activity fund; a pro-rated tuition system; refunds for uneaten meals; and clarification of “fictitious laboratory fees.” A number of them addressed campus facilities: more public telephones because there were only two on campus; renovation of showers and shower curtains (since students at that time had to shower in a pseudo-public bathroom “like they do in in Parchman” [Margie Quince, personal interview]; and “a more adequate laundry.” They also demanded that the “privilege of name selection for buildings be granted to the persons that use them---the students” (Exhibit Two). Though the school report offers no mention of the dedication ceremony incident, student accounts in the next chapter do.

The patriarchal, paternalistic hold on the college was still apparent, considering the college’s refusal to lift some of the rules that directly applied to women. Those demands, some of which were the same from the year before, included the right for licensed female students to own and operate motor vehicles on campus; and extension of sophomore curfew hours to second-semester freshman girls. They also demanded that the policy defining designated visitation hours on designated days be removed from the Student Handbook (called “The Informer”). They said, “We demand that it be made known that every night visiting night if the student so desires.” They argued “the misleading clause designating certain nights to visit should apply to inmates of prisons and not free students” (Exhibit Two). When students would visit their peers at their dorms during the designated hours, they had issues with dormitory “matrons:”

It should also be made avidly clear to all dormitory matrons that students desiring seats in the dormitory lounges within Dormitory Hours, on any night are free to be seated regardless of sex.

Dormitory matrons should be informed that asking persons to leave porches and steps of dormitory exteriors, as long as they are conducting themselves in an ethical manner is harassment that will not be tolerated at any time, by any student. (Exhibit Two).

On top of only the fact that they were only allowed to visit their friends on certain nights of the week during certain hours of the day, when they would visit their peers, they would apparently be harassed by those in charge at the dorms. Some “matrons” would not allow those of the opposite sex to even sit in the dormitory lounge, porches, or the stairs outside.

In addition to the harassment some experienced from dormitory matrons enforcing arbitrary curfew and visitation rules, students also had long-running issues with the armed nine-man security team on campus. They demanded a set of rules written to govern over the actions of those officers. The students asserted:

The Security Officers are currently operating within written rules and limitations. There have been numerous complaints of rude remarks and excessive “police brutality.” Without a system or pattern of action the security officers have begun to use the absence of a “Statute of Limitations” to their personal advantage for the explicit purpose of harassment and physical harm to students. After the rules have been drawn up they must be received by the S. G. A. for possible containment of misrepresentation and discrimination. (Exhibit Two).

Students were complaining about the overuse of force and brutality within the confines of their small college, yet because of the size, location, and demographics of the school, their struggle was largely overlooked. Their struggle was no less radical than those participating in the larger anti-war, anti-draft, anti-racist, feminist movements in big cities and on college campuses across America. What is clear is that students at Valley were taking part in all of those movements and making it specific to their community (as they always had).

After Gettis delivered the demands, he gave the Administrative Council a firm deadline of no later than February 4, 1970 at 6:30 p.m to approve all thirty in their entirety. President J. H. White was the only absent member at the meeting on the evening of January 9, leaving Vice President, Dr. O. P. Lowe, as acting

Chairman. Lowe responded to Gettis, the SGA, and their demands by explaining that the Administrative Council was only a “recommending body,” and they alone could not approve or disapprove anything. He subsequently and prematurely, as far as the SGA was concerned, dismissed the Council members. In a statement written by the SGA to the student body on January 28, they wrote it was closed “without deliberation, meditation or negotiation. This developed into an undesirable and unfeasible atmosphere for negotiation” (Exhibit Five).

Immediately following their dismissal, Gettis called Dr. White and about the same time, Dr. Lowe also called him and explained to him the occurrences at the meeting. This was the first time Dr. White was made aware that students had been working on a list of demands. After speaking with Gettis and Lowe, he ordered the Administrative Council and the representatives from the SGA to reconvene immediately, which they did until 4:30 a.m. January 10, 1970 (4). They agreed to continue negotiating on proper responses to the list later that day. At noon, student representatives, administrators (excluding J. H. White and O. P. Lowe who were absent), and faculty met in the Administration Building, where certain committees were selected and appointed to give special consideration to certain demands. Certain consideration was giving to the dismissal of designated visitation nights, allowing women to have cars on campus, clarification of fictitious laboratory fees, extension of sophomore curfew hours to second-semester freshman women, dismissal of the optional dress rule, and open washeteria facilities. Those committees met and typed up their recommendations for each demand.

Once President White arrived at Administration Building and was headed to his office, he was met by Tyrone Gettis. Gettis told him the results of the deliberations and instructed him to approve and sign, then and there, the document they typed with their recommendations for each demand. White refused to sign, saying he had not yet had the chance to read it. Gettis told the President that it didn’t matter if he signed it now or later, he eventually was going to have to sign it (6). Just before Gettis said this, some of the students who had been in the deliberations that day walked up to them. The report asserted: “after hearing Gettis’s statement a considerable confusion and disorder ensued and several of the [SGA] representatives joined in loudly protesting that the demands were to be met immediately” (6). Then, SGA Vice President,

Elijah McGee of Hattiesburg, allegedly told the president as the meeting was concluding: “We are going to leave. You have until February 4 at 6:30 p.m. to approve our demands. If they are not met by then, we will know what to do” (6). The implication in the report seems to be that what his threat went beyond a boycott of classes, but there was no evidence that showed anything to the contrary.

The report then added a special “NOTE: Throughout the encounter between the President, other school officials and representatives of the [SGA], the attitude, particularly of the President and Vice President...was arbitrary, belligerent, disrespectful, overbearing, and arrogant” (6). As stated in the beginning, one of the main aims of the report was to show how the attitude of the students, particularly those in student leadership, were those exact characteristics just emphasized. The student leadership itself, by their verbiage, was intransigently committed to non-violence. Many were militant and radical in the same way Dr. King was militant and radical in his activism and commitment to civil disobedience. The tone they are trying to apply to the students, by the report alone, is just hearsay. Saying “we’ll know what to do” if the President didn’t meet their demands hardly qualifies as a death threat.

The following day, January 11, a meeting was held in Greenwood at the urgency of President White, between him and representatives of law enforcement and local government. This was the first of many meetings that would occur over the next month, in which college officials met with outside law enforcement agencies for advice regarding the student activism on campus. Those in attendance were: President White and Vice President Lowe; Leflore County Sheriff, John L. Arterbury; Mayor of Greenwood, Thurman Henry; Greenwood commissioners, Charles E. Wright and Jack Ditto; Highway Patrolman, Andrew P. McBride; and the college’s legal representatives, W. H. Wontjoy and Travis H. Clark. At the meeting, Dr. White and Dr. Lowe “acquainted the law enforcement officers with the situation at the college” and “the attitude of the student leaders was particularly emphasized” (8). The attitude they emphasized was undoubtedly the “belligerent, disrespectful, overbearing, and arrogant” attitude that justified sending hundreds of teenagers to Parchman and closing the school entirely for all students.

On Thursday, January 22, 1970, a memorandum with administrative recommendations for each of the demands was distributed on campus. They agreed to meet a number of the demands, including no

specified nights for visitation and allowing licensed females to keep a car on campus. The college administration's response to the vast majority, though, was either a promise that certain steps will be made or already had been made (for example, they claimed they were already in the process of distributing academic scholarships, that they were going to request as many public telephone installations to the phone company as "the service and use merits," and they assured students that shower curtains had been purchased and repairs were forthcoming) or a denial of their ability to change certain policies because of overpowering IHL policies. Even the demands the administration did compromise on, such as the naming of school buildings, was ultimately left up to the IHL Board (they agreed to a committee of three faculty, three alumni, and three students to make recommendations to the president, who in turn, would make recommendation to the IHL Board). Several of the demands were flat-out denied, such as providing a full-time physician (Exhibit Four).

On the evening of Wednesday, January 28, ten SGA students, led by Gettis and McGee, interrupted a faculty meeting being held in the auditorium of the Administration Building. At the meeting, White asked the faculty for their support on his approach to the demands. Gettis then interrupted Dr. Lowe, who allowed him to give a statement about the published responses to the demands. Gettis said that statement written by Lowe and signed by the Administrative Council which stated firmly that all the Administrative Council members told the SGA that they were merely a recommending body and could neither approve nor disapprove anything without the president's approval. All they could do was make recommendations to the president. Gettis, who believed the SGA and administration came to a firm agreement to all thirty demands on January 10, said that was "a damn lie." It was at that point that Dr. Lowe instructed him to get off the stage and a tense exchange took place. Security guards started filtering into the auditorium and the students walked out (10).

Later that evening, in response to the literature distributed by the administration, the SGA wrote their own statement to the student body (see appendix B). The administrative report includes a copy of the statement (Exhibit Five) and outlines explicitly the two most important features of it, which were 1) Gettis' attitude that the demands were non-negotiable and that they must be complied with by the deadline of February 4. They gave their own understanding of what occurred January 9 and 10, 1970 and the

confrontation with White after they finished typing up the agreements to the demands. They warned about the literature distributed by the administration earlier that day. They declared that the SGA and its board members “seek sensible and intelligent answers. However, this propaganda will not in any way alter, obstruct, or stop our struggle for human recognition and respect as being part of this Institution” (Exhibit Five). The statement concluded by asserting that if the administration failed to respond in “an intelligent, respectful, constructive and positive way, then, Brothers and Sisters it is imperative that the SGA take all necessary and legal steps to acquire our Demands” (Exhibit Five).

In response to the growing unrest among the students and in preparation for more activism, President J. H. White released another memo addressed to the student body that Friday, January 30, 1970 (Exhibit Seven). He wrote that he wanted readers to look at the following “CAREFULLY” because this was the only statement he planned on releasing:

- “1. If the students are desirous of remaining in school, you will have to abide by the rules of the institution or withdraw from the institution. Faculty are asked to support the administration or resign. Because, a school without rules is like a ship without a rudder.
2. This institution will be run by the administration and the faculty and not the students. But it maintains an openness to discuss at all times any issues or problems pertinent to the success of the on-going of the institution. We are willing to make the necessary changes that we feel that promote harmony between administration, faculty and students for the attainment of our purpose – which is education.
3. Any property or personal damage at the institution will be subjected to arrest and court action.

As your president, I need every fair-minded student’s support for your good and MVSC. Thank you” (Exhibit Seven).

White implicitly stated that any students and faculty that failed to publicly support him were going to have to leave the college – and they did, whether that was permanently or not. The paternalism of “Daddy



White” was loud and clear and his subtle intimidation was still disarming. The students, however, had none of it and moved on with their planned course of action, despite his plea that they do otherwise.

On Monday, February 2, 1970, two days before the administration’s deadline to meet the demands, another memo was distributed to students, this time with the approvals or disapprovals of the demands signed by J. H. White. He approved most of the recommendations (not the demands), which the students were already unhappy with, like allowing women to have a car on campus. He disapproved of a number of them including ridding of the visiting hours schedule, having washeteria facilities open to male and female students, and extending sophomore curfew to second-semester freshman women, among others (Exhibit Eight).

The college’s account of the unrest claimed Elijah McGee took a copy of the memo and tore it up into pieces. He then delivered the ripped up pieces to the secretary of Dr. White. “Exhibit Nine,” the envelope containing the torn pieces was supposed to be attached, but it was not included (at least in the report in MVSU’s archives today). The envelope would have provided the school with another example of the student aggressive, disrespectful attitude of the student leaders, but is missing, and therefore leaves room for disbelief or suspicion (12).

### **Fannie Lou Hamer On Campus (February 3, 1970)**

On January 20, J. H. White approved Fannie Lou Hamer, famed and celebrated civil rights activist from Ruleville, to speak on campus in the H. G. Carpenter Auditorium on February 3, 1970 (Exhibit Ten). Hamer spoke on the campus February 1969 before 1,200 students and she likely addressed as much in the auditorium February 1970. A transcript of her speech is included in the report (although the transcript in the report is allegedly manipulated, according to Floyd Bailey) and excerpts are included in Appendix C. She spoke to students the day before the administration’s deadline to meet all of the students’ demands and the perceptions from the administration and the president stood in contrast to the students’ perceptions, which generally celebrated her.

According to the school:

her remarks were most inflammatory and directed principally toward Dr. White. She repeatedly made demands for his resignation or retirement. The whole tenor of the speech was insulting and abusive of both Dr. White and the present school administration and voiced hatred for white people generally because of their alleged exploitation of the black people. Gettis, in introducing Fannie Lou Hamer, stated that it was not he who would be compelled to leave the college, but that Dr. White would be the one (12).

Hamer's remarks were most definitely in the spirit of Black Power and radical change. Her speech was indeed a scathing polemic of Dr. White, who she proudly referred to as a "Nuclear Uncle Tom," ("Fannie Lou Hamer's Speech – Page One") and she did repeatedly advocate that he quit. Not once, however, did she advocate violence against him. She also never said that she felt hatred for white people, although she made it clear that what she did hate was the white power structure in Mississippi.

Hamer's speech was a radical declaration of support for the students, which meant she supported their call White's removal. She said that he should know by the reactions of his students that he is not wanted. She advised that he listen to his students before the black community completely dismissed him as a traitor and before the white power structure inevitably left him out to dry as soon as they were done using him. Hamer repeated her famous "sick and tired of being sick and tired" line and inspired the students to take action. She said to the students:

You see, I'm getting sick and tired, and sick and tired, and sick and tired of every place I go of white folks picking out our leaders. You can rest assure young people regardless of who you are, you can be black, white, green, brown, or gold colored, if the man picks them out for you, you ain't got nothing. Now that's what happening in these institutions, the state controlled. You know every building here is named after Mr. Somebody, Mr. So and So, Mr. Such and Such of Thing, but know I think this is ridiculous ("Fannie Lou Hamer's Speech – Page Three").

Hamer, while addressing the students in the H. G. Carpenter (a white, former IHL Board member), called out the "ridiculous" practice of having buildings at black colleges named after white supremacists with black college president happy to do it.

Hamer told the president, whom she addressed directly, that the students knew he was not going to do *everything* they demanded, but she told him he better give them *something* or they were going to leave. And if a college president has no students at the college, he has no job any white person is going to pay him to perform (6-7).

She continued in her address to White (who was likely not in the auditorium):

You know we're talking about equal education for our children, but yet you're trying to hold on to the man and this same man is setting up schools, private schools, to give their kids a different education to what our kids is getting, but at the same time when one of these young men out here in the audience get 18 and 21 years old, they'll pick him up and carry him to Vietnam to die for what we don't have.

I don't like a traitor. I don't like no man that will betray his own race. I don't like no man that will sit in a closed session and call for patrolmen and police guards to make out, for you to make out like that you are having to protect yourself from militants. Young people here is trying to get education, not harm you, but making demands that's really healthy for a college is it is to be progressive" (9).

The speech galvanized the auditorium. Hamer urged students to continue with their fight and struggle for freedom and wanted them to rest assured that if they needed it, she would organize with other activists like Dick Gregory and bring not hundreds, but thousands of people to the campus in support of them. She gave them a radical message and encouraged them to continue to demand things from the administration to win anything. Hamer told the students, "I'm one woman that will say I'm not free, but I'm proud, I'm black and I am fifty-two. But I just want you to know young people that you will have to demand because nobody, whether it's a little or much, nobody is going to give you anything on a silver platter. You'll have to fight and demand for your freedom" (6). In Hamer's final words of inspiring wisdom, she reminded students that their destiny was in their own hands. Whatever happened next – whether things changed at Valley or not – was entirely up to them.

The administration did not take well to the statements made by Hamer in her address to the students. J. H. White told the *Greenwood Commonwealth* that “All our problems here have been caused by outside agitators and we are going to protect the college from disturbances,” (“MVSC Head Reports ‘Campus Peaceful’”). Fannie Lou Hamer was probably one of the so-called “outside agitators” he was referring to. To White, anyone that was not an enrolled student or paid employee was an “outsider.” The year before, Wilhelm Joseph, who was enrolled at the school, was still perceived as an “outside agitator” because he was a Trinidadian-born immigrant with dissenting opinions. Anyone that challenged them was an agitator and if they weren’t already on the outside, the administration and the powers that be above the administration would make sure that was the case eventually.

### **Class Strike (February 5-February 11, 1970)**

The following day – Wednesday, February 4, 1970 – was the deadline given to the administration to meet student demands, or “D” Day. That night, SGA president, Tyrone Gettis of Utica, Mississippi, delivered a speech to the students. Gettis, known for his powerful oratory skills, incited enthusiasm for the boycott of classes that would begin the next day and mobilized collective actions. A transcript of his speech is included in the school report and seems likely that it was transcribed from a Sovereignty Commission-approved wire. The majority of the transcription is included in appendix D. The speech was likely included to prove the attitude of the leaders, but he urges students to practice non-violence throughout his speech, which represent the only words from a student directly in the entire report.

Gettis visited both the Highway Patrol Office and the National Guard Armory in Greenwood to get a sense of the kind of response their activism should expect. He said, “But we feel that our fight is not the Highway Patrol nor of the National Guard, our enemy lives in ‘Friendship Manor,’” (2) i.e., the President’s house. He reminded his fellow *student*-activists, “Now I would like to encourage you that during the boycott to keep abreast of your studies and don’t become lax because we know that we are here for academic studies, but we have a little problem that we have to take care of” (3). He also spoke of suspects “cheese-eaters” or rats (snitches) within their circle—which Eddie Carthan, James McBride, and Theophilus King all discussed

in their oral histories. He warned them: “We got a house nigger somewhere around. Now we have suspicious persons under suspicion, suspected cheese eaters – Now what the cheese eaters don’t know is that we know them. You see some of the people they confided in are paid by us. You see, you see, we got people that are sympathetic to our way of thinking also” (3). Gettis reminded the students that they should be prepared to be in this for the long haul: “You see we’re fighting for a reason and not the season, so we can make it an annual event if he wants it that way.” (4)

Gettis addressed the different outlets of news in Mississippi and the ones that were on their side and the ones that were clearly oppositional to their struggle:

“I’ll like for you to know that the Associated Press in Jackson knows of your fight, the *Delta Democrat-Times* in Greenville knows of your fight. The person from the Associated Press, Mr. McGandy [Morganti] was the person who came to our aid last year when White sent Jane Biggers to print the misleading article about the Love-In and of course, Mr. [Morganti] took care of this in his own way. I talked to him personally and he agreed that everything would be done to the best of reporting standards in our favor” (4).

The *Delta Democrat-Times (DD-T)* was the Greenville newspaper edited by Hodding Carter III, the son of Hodding Carter Jr., a powerful, controversially progressive Delta leader. The *DD-T* was quite liberal by Mississippi standards, and the journalism done by staff writers Dial Parrot and Bob Boyd was the most detailed, presumably accurate, and consistently covered work on the unrest at Valley. Leroy Morganti from the Associated Press was also clearly on their side. Jane Biggers was working for the *Greenwood Commonwealth* until 1968 when she moved to the *Clarion-Ledger*. Which side the *Clarion-Ledger* definitely did not have to be questioned during this time: it was the side of the oppressor in this case (and many others).

Gettis closed his remarks by speaking about the police officers on campus:

The security officers have new shiny black night sticks. I would like to reassure myself that they don’t intend to use them on anybody black. They have to be made for White because I feel like this, I want one of them to raise one at me. Now in order to get on with tonight’s activities we would like

for you to remain orderly and remain non-violent and wait until the activities officially begin so we can inform you as to what's happening tomorrow (5).

Before closing, Gettis instructed the students to meet him the following morning at 7:30 a.m. in the parking lot, where more details would be disseminated regarding the boycott.

On the morning of Thursday, February 5, 1970, the boycott of classes officially began and as instructed by Gettis, approximately 250 students, according the MVSC report, met in the parking lot that day ("Construction..." 13). Students marched from the parking lot to Dr. White's residence, "Friendship Manor." The report alleged:

the group resorted to violence, tore the doors off of cupboards located in Dr. White's garage, destroyed some of his shrubbery, tore the fence down surrounding the rose garden, hung Dr. White in effigy, and injured two security guards with rock throwing. The wound to one of the security guards (Officer Love) required hospitalization and eight stitches to his head (14).

A photograph of students hanging White in effigy was published in *Jet Magazine*. The "rock throwing" incident counters the narratives of the students entirely, which doesn't mean it didn't take place, but possibly it did not. What was not mentioned in the report was the violence experienced by students. It was reported in the *Hattiesburg American* and the *Greenwood Commonwealth* (via Morganti and the Associated Press) that "one student received a cut over an eye when he was struck with a nightstick by one officer, and a coed was hit by another officer. No arrests or serious injuries were reported" ("Fighting at College in Protest March"; "MVSC Students March on President's Home").

The boycott continued into Friday (Feb. 6) with marches and various demonstrations throughout the day. That afternoon, a meeting took place with E. E. Thrash, the executive secretary of the IHL Board, Travis H. Clark Jr, W. H. Montjoy, Professor John A. James, L. O. Lowe, and Willie L. Malone, in which two documents were prepared to be distributed to students the following day (Saturday, Feb. 7). Those documents included a letter from White to all students "in which the President directed attention to the requirement for regular school attendance and in which he urged resumption of class attendance" and a

Proclamation, signed by Lowe, which limited student demonstrations to the Quad and required permission to do so (“Construction of Events...,” 15).

In the letter to the student body (see Appendix E), President White emphasized the school policies regarding attendance, and threatened that if classes were not attended on Monday, students would be expelled. He also gave reassurances that there would be adequate protection and security personnel on campus for those who did wish to attend class on Monday and thereafter until “normal conditions” were restored (Exhibit Twelve).

Acting Dean of Students (a role that students demanded be filled), Vice President Dr. Lowe, signed a Proclamation limiting student assembly to the gymnasium and student demonstrations to the quad in front of the Administration building into order on Saturday, February 7, 1970. Further, it read:

Other places for student demonstrations may be requested in writing directed to the Dean of Students at the Administration Building. No demonstration at a place other than the Quadrangle can be had unless approved in writing by the Dean of Students. Such requests must be given to the Dean of Students during business hours – from 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. – at least twelve hours in advance of the proposed time of the demonstration. Demonstrations must be orderly and controlled. All sidewalks, door, and walkways must be kept clear so as not to interfere with normal traffic (Exhibit Thirteen).

Requests for demonstrations anywhere other than the quad (in plain view of the Administration Building) had to be approved by the Dean of Students, who was at the time, O. P. Lowe. After reading Lowe’s Proclamation, Gettis wrote across one of them, “You can go straight to HELL!! I WILL DEMONSTRATE WHERE I PLEASE.” He then gave it to Dr. Lowe’s secretary to deliver to the Vice President and acting Dean of Students (Exhibit Fourteen).

### **The Feds**

At approximately 9:30 Saturday morning, Kenneth Fairly, Director of Mississippi’s Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) Division, received an urgent telephone call at the Division of Law

Enforcement from Charles Q. Coffman, associate director of the IHL Board and other staff personnel. Those on the other end of the call described the incident at MVSC and deliberated what the best actions would be going forward. Fairly was a former law enforcement officer, who was in Oxford during the 1962 riot and was a journalist who investigated the KKK and later had a column with the *Clarion-Ledger*. The LEAA was a federal agency within the Department of Justice, established by the 1968 Omnibus Crime Bill, and provided federal funding to local and state police departments. In 1969, Fairly accepted the position to lead Mississippi's LEAA Division in Jackson at the request of Governor John Bell Williams, before moving on to the drug enforcement bureau newly created (Fairly).

The morning of Saturday, February 7, 1970, Fairly and the IHL decided that it was better not to use the Mississippi Highway Patrol. "A better idea would be to utilize an all-black task force recruited voluntarily from the various municipalities throughout the State of Mississippi" (Fairly 4). Once they decided that, "Immediately, logistical problems arose: a staging area for the officers, should they be recruited, communications, transportation, etc." (Fairly 4).

Later that day, E. E. Thrash, Kenneth Fairly, Commissioner of Public Safety Giles Crisler and his administrative assistant, Charles Snodgrass, and an attorney for the Mississippi Highway Patrol, Leman Gandy, all met briefly with Mississippi Governor John Bell Williams. The Governor then "made the necessary arrangements" with the Adjutant General to use the National Guard Armory at Moorehead, Mississippi for the black officers to meet the following day at 4 p.m. The LEAA Mississippi Division was then responsible for recruiting the black officers for the task force (4).

Fairly returned to the Division office in Jackson and assembled staff members George Phyfer, George Metz, Joe Ware, and Wayland Clifton, Jr., soon joined by Dr. Thrash and Dr. Coffman. That afternoon at around 1 p.m., they started contacting police chiefs and mayor from around the state. By 11:30 that night, fifty-eight officers from twenty-six municipalities had been "committed to the assignment of restoring order at the Mississippi Valley State College campus" (4).

Prior to the task force's first meeting the next day, Fairly called two people for advice: George M. Murphy, LEAA's Southeastern Regional Director in Atlanta, and Paul Estaver, the Acting Chief of the LEAA Civil



Disorder Section in Washington. During the day, numerous conversations were carried on with both men, who provided valuable advice and counsel. The “immediate problem was whether or not there existed, in the ranks of black police officers in MS, men with command experience to handle and direct a force of 58 police officers drawn from the most diverse backgrounds and municipalities” (4).

At 7 p.m. that evening, George M. Murphy, contacted Ray Pope, Senior Programs Specialist of the Atlanta Region, LEAA, and instructed him to contact Fairly. He did, and Fairly alerted him of the following:

- (1) the student body at MVSC, Itta Bena, MS, was in ‘revolt’ against the administration of the college;
- (2) Fairly has already conferred with Paul Estaver, Acting Chief of Civil Disorders Program Division. In this conversation Mr. Estaver agreed with Mississippi’s idea of recruiting black police officers from the various cities in MS to send to MVSC to strengthen the college security forces; (3) MVSC is an all-black institution.

Fairly had requested that Pope help him locate a black police officer with command experience, who might be brought into the college to serve as a consultant. Contact had been made with officials in New Orleans, Atlanta, Jacksonville, and Detroit, to no avail. Fairly also requested, if at all possible, that Pope proceed to Mississippi to render technical assistance to the Executive Director of the Division and to Dr. Thrash (Pope 1).

The next morning – Sunday, February 8, 1970 – Kenneth again called Pope and requested his presence in Mississippi and asked if he could arrive in time for the meeting in Greenwood with the officers. Pope agreed and departed Atlanta at noon. He was met at the Jackson airport by the Mississippi Highway Patrol’s plane, which transported him to Greenwood to the meeting at the Patrol’s sub-station there (Pope 2). Present at the meeting was E. E. Thrash and other members of the IHL Board, J. H. White, representatives from the State Attorney General’s office, the Mississippi Highway Patrol, and attorneys for the Dept. of Public Safety. Also present at the meeting was Willie Carson, a black officer with nineteen years of experience in the Greenville Police Department, who was placed in command of the task force as he had the most experience. Carson, who gave his oral history in 1977, said:

I told them that I was in charge, that I didn't want anyone to tell me anything, that if I needed any assistance from any law enforcement agency or any group, or district attorney, I would ask. I said I wanted no invasions on the campus unless I said so for I'd take full responsibility for the security of the campus. It was agreed and I was sworn in under proper procedure to uphold the law. They gave me full authority and command (12).

After this brief meeting in Greenwood, where a "broad overview" was given by the attorney of the IHL Board, and "tactical operations" were discussed, the group proceeded to the National Guard Armory in Moorhead for a meeting with the 58 black officers (Fairly 5).

At the Armory, Dr. White addressed the fifty-eight officers. He described the situation at the college and generally what the duties for the task force were. He then commissioned the officers as Security Officers of MVSC. According to Fairly, "each officer was later presented an individual commission under the appropriate section of the Mississippi Code, giving the officer full police authority on the MVSC college campus" (5).

That evening, just after dark, the officers moved the men into a new, unoccupied men's dormitory on campus, which functioned as their headquarters. Using one of twelve walkie-talkie radios made available to E. E. Thrash by the National Guard, Carson "immediately set up his command post in the new dormitory, organized his men into three shifts and a headquarters detachment, and proceeded in a very professional manner to operate a police department for the MVSC campus" (Fairly 6). According to Carson, immediately after moving in "I got set up a working roster, just as you'd have for a city. There wasn't but one city in the state, except Jackson, with 65 police under command. Men with rank were put in charge of different shifts of work. I set up an office – clerks and dispatchers" (12). MVSC's unoccupied men's dorm now functioned as one of the largest police departments in the state and existed all for a campus of less than three thousand people.

Carson recalled "the students were riled up. They came down saying, 'The Uncle Tom niggers are here'" (12). After the police department was set up in the dormitory, at around 10 p.m., the officers "went out to stand around and let the students know we weren't afraid. They cursed us a while and made all kinds

of ugly remarks” (12). The remainder of the evening was reportedly uneventful, though both the students and the administration knew the following day would be another battle against one another. Dr. White had reportedly been told they wanted him fired, to which he said, “but I am not going to move. They have said Monday is the day. Well, I don’t know who is going, but it won’t be me” (qtd, in “MVSC Students March; Two Leaders Arrested: ‘Beefed Up’ Security Guard Keeps Order”). The two groups were officially at a stand-off against one another and dedicated to being the last ones standing after the war.

### **Tensions Boil Over (Monday, February 9, 1970)**

That Monday - February 9, 1970 – was the fourth day of the boycott, erupted into “chaos.” That morning, the officers went to the school cafeteria for breakfast, “there was considerable booing and taunting of the officers by members of the student body” (Fairly 6). According to Willie Carson, “That was my mistake. I should have had the men eat in the dorm until we got better acquainted” (12). Fairly, who did not actually arrive on campus until later that morning, alleges that “one student spat into the breakfast plate of one officer in an apparent attempt to enrage him and provoke him to violence. Showing unusual restraint and professionalism, this officer merely took his tray, returned to the cafeteria serving line and obtained a new plate of food.” According to Carson, “a student took a plate of hot grits and eggs and threw it in an officer’s face, he was from Jackson. Red, as they called him, jumped up and drew his gun and I said, ‘Man, we can’t have that. Get something to wash his face’” (14). Elijah McGee, who was accused of doing this in the cafeteria that morning, denies doing so (“Keady bars MVSC leader”).

After the exchanges in the cafeteria that morning, Carson called a meeting and said, “We’d have to expect some of these types of things, but our object here is to get the school in condition where it could operate. We don’t want to whip or kill anybody unless it is absolutely necessary.’ I said, ‘As long as I’m standing, no student gets whipped’” (Carson 15). In his oral history, he remembered saying to the students: when I was a boy there was nothing to inspire me because the colleges were in the southern part of the state. I couldn’t understand why they’d want to wreck a black college, when I was their age I could get my mind on nothing but a cotton field. I told them that the legislature, the Board of

Higher Education and Mr. Thrash, they were the ones giving the orders not Mr. White. I told them too that there was no use to cause White bodily harm because the legislature, the governor would have to put the doctors there [on campus] – not White. All he could do was ask for them” (15). He urged the students to shift their blame from the black college president to the white powers that be that loomed above him and controlled his decisions. Students seemed willing to communicate with Carson, if not at all with Dr. White.

In spite of White’s threat of expulsion, the boycott was nearly 100% successful on Monday, with attendance virtually non-existent, “with only one of two students attending classes” (Morganti, “MVS Student Leaders Ask Non-Violence After Arrests”). That morning, some “1,000-1,500 of the school’s nearly 2,500 students staged a protest march across the campus and a rally in the school auditorium.” Many of the students brought signs to the rally which said “White – the Delta’s No. 1 House Nigger” and “White Must Go—Get Him.” At the rally, Gettis urged students to continue to “follow a policy of non-violence in pressing the demands, but he lashed out at the school’s action in bringing in a black security force. “Those black pigs are still wanting for you to do something so they can shoot at you,’ he said. “The whites sent an all-black force here so you black people can kill each other” (Morganti “MVS Student Leaders...”).

At 8:30 a.m. that morning, at the same time a majority of students were demonstrating on campus, Leflore County Justice of the Peace, Mrs. Josephine Y. Rustici, issued warrants for arrest against Tyrone Gettis and Elijah McGee. They were charged with “unlawful engagement in a mass demonstration in such a manner as to unreasonably interfere with the free ingress and egress to and from state property, to wit the Business Education Building of Mississippi Valley State College” (Morganti, “MVSC operating under all-night curfew”). At approximately 12:30 p.m., Lt. Carson and a contingent of officers entered the Jacob Aron Student Union Building to issue the warrants to the president and vice president of the SGA. When the two leaders were first located on campus, other students prevented officers from arresting them. They headed to the Jacob Aron Student Union (another building named after a wealthy white man) to contact their attorneys. Minutes later, at around 12:30 p.m., the cops pushed their way through at least a thousand students and issued the warrants to McGee and Gettis (Morganti, MVSC operating under all-night curfew”). In the

presence of 1,000-1,500 students, the two young men were escorted from the Student Union to the front entrance and placed in the custody of John Arterbury, Leflore County Sherriff.

As Gettis and McGee were being escorted from the union to the front entrance, students poured out of the building. The report states, “large demonstrations occurred. Conditions on campus were completely chaotic. All semblance of order disappeared” (“Construction of Events...”, 18). One student (although he allegedly had only just registered that morning), John Ward of Chicago, who stayed in Grenada with his grandparents, was particularly confrontational with the officers, and ended up being arrested for “disturbing the peace.” The three men were transported to Leflore County Jail, where bond was later set at \$500 each. The two leaders remained in Leflore County for about two days before bond was finally posted. By noon on Wednesday, following the release of Gettis and McGee, Ward remained in Leflore County Jail (Fairly 6).

At the first chance he had, White took the opportunity to fire two faculty members vocally supportive of the students and highly critical of White and the administration. White summoned two professors, Dr. Richard Tucker, a beloved social science teacher and SGA faculty adviser, and Professor N. A. D. Thompson, an economics teacher, into his office and dismissed them both from their teaching post for “inefficiency.” Earlier in the day, administrative officers checked their classrooms and discovered neither attended (Fairly 6). This was the same day when it reported that only one or two students even went to class, with the boycott being virtually universal. They were both evidently set up as soon as it was possible.

To deal with the relative uproar and to prohibit students from organizing as much as possible on campus after the arrests of the two student government leaders, President White issued an Emergency Proclamation, which put an 8 p.m. curfew into effect and locked all buildings after 7:30 p.m. The Proclamation promised anyone in defiance of the rules “will be subjected to legal and disciplinary action” (Exhibit Sixteen). This was implemented in spite of the fact that student leaders and the SGA exclusively advocated for non-violent civil disobedience.

Prior to being taken into custody, Gettis appointed Harold Dean from Yazoo City as student leader. Following their arrests, Dean called a meeting in the gymnasium and urged students to continue their policy of non-violence and to follow the newly imposed curfew to the letter (Morganti, “MVSC operating under all-

night campus curfew”). When the students booed at his request, Dean warned, “The only way we can win this is to prove that we are intelligent people. President White just wants us to become violent. He knows that if we just do that, he can win it” (Parrott, “Boycott continues at Valley State amid heavy contingent of police”). Morganti and Parrot both confirmed that once again, non-violence was stressed by the student leaders. Students listened to Dean and went back to their dorms immediately after the meeting.

That evening was reportedly uneventful, with the exception of one un-related incident in the men’s dorm when a student put his arm through a glass window, leaving a severe cut. Students attempted to administer first aid, before he was rushed to the hospital in Greenwood by one of the officers. According to Kenneth Fairly, who left the campus that evening around 11 p.m., “the attending physician there later credited Officer Stepney with saving the man’s life, saying that had he not received first aid from the police officer, in all probability he would have bled to death” (7). Ray Pope claimed the incident “helped their ‘student relations’” and he alleged that the “jeers and cat calls from the students have now stopped” though he was not on campus that evening and returned to Atlanta the following morning. Neither Fairly, nor Pope, in their description of this incident or in their interpretation of the incident as ultimately a positive one, acknowledged the fact that students were boycotting classes to dramatize their demands, one of which was a full time physician on campus, so they did not have to be rushed to the hospital in Greenwood should anything happen that required medical attention beyond basic first aid.

### **A Mass Arrest of Black Students (Tuesday, February 10, 1970)**

Dial Parrot and Bob Boyd, the two journalists from the *Delta Democrat-Times* covering the unrest at Valley, painted a starkly different picture of the campus and the “task force.” Parrott wrote a piece published on Tuesday morning, February 10, 1970, titled “Boycott continues at Valley State amid heavy contingent of police,” (see Appendix F). Parrot wrote, “At the request of college President J. H. White and the state college board, MVSC has been transformed into an armed camp.” Outside White’s office, two armed guards block the door and though he assured the reporters that they would not use their rifles if students tried to rush his office (which is why he said they were necessary in the first place), he did confirm they were “former

maintenance men on special duty.” In fact, he reported that some of the janitorial staff attended the Mississippi Police Training Academy in Jackson “for special instruction in student demonstration control” (Parrot, “Boycott continues...”).

Around 7:30 a.m., students went to the gymnasium for a meeting, in accordance with proclamation signed into order by L. O. Lowe, limiting students to the gymnasium for meetings, and the quadrangle in front of the Administration Building for demonstrations (“Construction of Events...” 19). Following the meeting, shortly after 8 a.m., students gathered for a demonstration in their permitted zone in front of the Administration Building – right in plain view of the college administration and state officials. The school reported that the number in this morning demonstration was 300-400, although Kenneth Fairly claimed there was approximately eight hundred students that “gathered and listened to orations from student body leaders” that morning. “Many were wearing shirts with the clinched Black Power symbol and carrying Black Power slogans,” he continued (7). Fairly made it clear in 1969 what his stance was on the Black Power movement and especially the Black Panther Party in a piece written the year before in the *Clarion-Ledger* (“Campus Roars Heard,” see appendix G). He concluded the piece urging the State to restore the campus by any means necessary: “Either the State has the power, the authority to regulate its colleges and campuses, or it does not. Now is the time to find out. Clear out the protestors at Itta Bena and let them go elsewhere to create turmoil, or permit them to attend school under the rules and regulations set down by the governing body. To do otherwise is pure folly” (“Campus Roars...”). Fairly, as the representative of “the State,” followed through with that recommendation in 1970.

According to Fairly, after about 30 minutes of demonstration in the quad, the group of approximately eight hundred began a march on the Home Economics Building. At that point, Sgt. Walter Cole of the Vicksburg police, a squad leader, stepped forward and negotiated with student body leaders, who inquired what would happen if they continued to march on the Home Economics building. He told them that, as “peace officers” on the MVSC campus, “the officers would use whatever force necessary to prevent entry into the building, that students could retire into the quadrangle in front of the Administration Building which had been designated for student demonstrations or face arrest” (7, emphasis added).

The report from the school alleges that the marching students went from the Administrative Building to the Nursery School, “where they were stopped by Security Guards and told to go back to the quadrangle or disperse. They went back to the quadrangle and then broke up around 12 p.m., when they took a lunch break” (“Construction of Events...”, 19). Lt. Willie Carson’s personal testimony aligns with this narrative (even if it is not the exact occurrence), as he remembered an instance in which he communicated with the “radical leaders.” He told them “stay with me so I could keep my eye on them. They had to do something I said in order to stay on campus. I’d say, ‘I want that demonstration broken up there. It’s in the wrong place.’ They’d go straight and break it up” (17). Some of the “radical leaders” were described as receptive and compliant, which counters the narrative that students were violently militant, rock-throwing thugs that some journalists, school officials, and federal officials may have you believe.

While students were at lunch, President White issued a directive, which stated that if classes were not met that afternoon and the following morning, the school would be closed the next day – Wednesday, February 11, 1970 at 11 a.m. At that time, all buildings, including the cafeteria, would be closed and the dorms would be closed at 4 p.m. All scholarships were being revoked. A selective admission policy was going to be implemented once students could register for the modified semester on February 19. Classes would start again on Monday, February 23. Those students that would not be re-admitted would have their tuition refunded on a pro-rata basis. For the students who wanted to attend classes for the remainder of the day and the next morning, he assured them they had adequate protection. Finally, his last instruction to the students was “There will be no further demonstrations of any kind. All students who violate this rule will be removed from campus” (Exhibit Eighteen). The students’ reaction to being told that they could no longer demonstrate was, naturally, to demonstrate.

Students responded to White’s ultimatum by marching to the registrar’s office and procuring between 400-500 withdrawal forms, according the school report (20). The report alleged that only two of the forms were actually completed and turned in to the Registrar’s Office. The school administration said “The rest were strewn about the campus causing a major littering problem on the grounds of the college. A grass fire of unknown origin was started on the lawn to the West of the Administration Building. This fire spread



over an area of approximately one and one-half acres because campus fire truck could be called to extinguish it. There were numerous charred copies of the President's directive found on the ground which the fire had burned" (20). No other source (as far as personal research has gone) reported on such a fire or even a "major littering problem" caused by incomplete withdrawal forms strewn about the campus.

The actual moments leading up to the decision being made to arrest nearly a thousand black college students, are uncertain, as there are a number of inconsistent stories. After lunch, students were demonstrating in front of the cafeteria. Then, they began to march around the campus. They went from the cafeteria to the president's house to the back of the Administration Building. When they proceeded to the back of the Business Education Building to the main entrance, they were stopped by police. The guards at the main gate confronted them and told them to disperse or otherwise be arrested for blocking a public road (Parrot, "Writ expected to be asked to free 889 MVSC Students," see Appendix H).

According to Dial Parrott, staff writer for the *Delta Democrat-Times*, the arrests were made at 4:30 p.m. after the students had gathered approximately two hundred yards from the main gate "in a face-to-face confrontation" with the all-black police force. Parrott wrote, "The two groups met after the students marched along a campus road on the north side of the groups before running head-on into the 60 helmeted and armed officers. Both groups stood at an apparent standstill for about 30 minutes" ("Writ expected..." see Appendix H).

The exact details of what occurred in the hours before, during, and after the mass arrest are further unclear because of the active attempt of law enforcement officers to keep reporters off the campus grounds. Parrot discussed the harassment experienced by reporters on campus by a number of aggressive, overbearing, disrespectful officers. Then, at 4:30 p.m., they started arresting students:

The police herded the students into buses. The students did not resist. At about 4:45 p.m., an estimated 25 car highway patrol armada arrived outside the main gate. The patrol cars then escorted the buses to the Leflore County Penal Farm where the first load of students was imprisoned. Not all of the students could be loaded onto the first contingent of buses. Some waited as long as three hours in the windy, 40-degree weather to be taken aboard.

“Throughout the day of the arrests, White was in conference in the school administration building with state officials. Armed security guards stood guard there” (Parrott, “Writ expected...”).

The first numbers reported of those arrested was 889, of which 886 were said to have gone to Parchman and three minors were taken to Leflore County Penal Farm. The official number from Parchman was actually 440 women and 454 men, totaling 894—which doesn’t include the three minors at Leflore County and the three students arrested the day before (Gettis, McGee, and Ward). The total number then across the two days of arresting was 900 students (Parrot and Boyd, “US Judge...”)

Lt. Willie Carson offered his own version of the event years later in 1977 when his oral history was collected. Students were frustrated by the lack of publicity and wanted to know what they could do to get more. Carson told them “just violate the law – block that highway.” He continued:

The next evening they blocked the distance from that school to the highway” (15). Carson was not “anticipating any arrest.” As he remembered, “I didn’t have anything to haul them away in. The sheriff [of Leflore County] asked, ‘what did you arrest all of those damn black niggers for?...I don’t have enough room for them – no place to put them. I don’t know what I’m going to do with them.’ I said, ‘That’s your problem.’ His problem was he had to feed that crowd of 850. There was County Cage, but it was inadequate. They used the word ‘nigger’ and all type of thing. I had to send my officers to make charges. The highway patrol was standing around so I made the students get on the buses that the Catholic people from St. Francis School loaned, I explained to them if they stirred up the people, there’d be nothing I could do about it and told them ‘they could holler all they wanted, but stay on the bus. If this mob attacks you, there’s nothing I can do’” (16).

Carson explained that “Parchman was the only place large enough to hold them. They raised the roof off calling mama to come get them, calling papa to come get them. They had a time scrapping blankets because it was cool. The fight was out of them. When we returned to campus, there was no trouble” (16). The fight was definitely not out of all of the students, but the Parchman experience affected them all in some way.

## Parchman

Students were photographed and finger-printed at Leflore County before being taken to Parchman. Parchman Superintendent Tom D. Cook “and other prison farm officials had gone without sleep for almost two days in making preparations to house the sudden influx of students... who totaled 50 percent of the normal Parchman population” (“US judge...”). Though nearly 900 students were incarcerated at the notorious prison plantation, surprisingly few published accounts exist from the students who were taken there. The numbers are limited, but a few students were interviewed for articles or wrote their own editorials about their experiences inside. Twenty-year-old sophomore James E. Ray from Memphis was arrested and bussed to Parchman. He said, “The arrest came as a surprise because we had gone to some effort to keep the demonstrations non-violent (“More Student Unrest Predicted At School”).” Ray, who was attending MVSC on an athletic scholarship, said “the athletes were serving as marshals to keep the crowd of students under control. He said they were carrying no sticks and were not talking in a boisterous manner” (“More Student Unrest Predicted At School”). That students were not talking in a boisterous manner also counters the narrative of the administration in their justification for closing the school.

In a “Letter to the Editor” piece published in the *Delta Democrat-Times* on February 19, entitled “Inside ‘Alcatraz,’” “Frances Whippel” described her experience (see Appendix J). The reference to Alcatraz is telling of her experience at Parchman. She says for those curious about what it is like on the inside, “I can truthfully say I am not anxious to go back but before I will be defeated by White I will.” The students arrived at Parchman at 11 p.m. They were signed in and searched before finally being taken to their cells at 2 a.m. Women were taken to Maximum Security Unit and the men were taken to the First Offenders Unit. The cell block consisted of 20 cells with two bunks in each, two solitary cells and two showers which were out of order. There were also mattresses placed around the cell block on the floor. Most of the girls preferred to sleep on the floor. At midnight, White sent over some of the food that had already been prepared on campus earlier, since “he couldn’t eat it all himself,” though many girls rejected it because of who sent it. They didn’t get any food from the prison until 11 a.m. the next day, when they “were served cold toast without butter,

eggs and bacon and nothing to drink...we were fortunate because some of the students only got cold toast and eggs. The girls who didn't get breakfast only got an orange" (Whippel).

Most disturbing to Whippel was the fact that they were taken to Parchman "and no one knew why. When our parents tried to locate us, no one knew where we were. 889 students missing and no one knows where they are? Sounds more like a kidnapping than an arrest." She posed the question, "What kind of man did this to us? A man with a warped mind, twisted soul and evil thoughts. What other kind of man would be concerned with the appearance of the campus rather than giving the students an education. What kind of supposed to be black man can do this to others of his supposed to be same race? I really can't dig it" (Whippel).

Beverly Wade, a sophomore SGA officer from Crystal springs believed the "arrests and imprisonment had made the students that much stronger in their struggle. 'Our demands are just. We know our cause is right,' she said. 'White feels it is his institution, not the students. He will try to keep out those who are not going along with his dictatorship,' she said" ("US judge..."). Somewhat ironically, the impassioned sophomore calling her college president a dictator would later become the first black female president of Tougaloo College.

Harold Dean maintained, as always, that the students were dedicated to non-violence and unwilling to stop their fight. Roosevelt Yarbrough, another SGA officer and Vietnam War Marine veteran, said "I just got out of Vietnam two months ago fighting for these people and now they throw me in jail. White doesn't seem to appreciate we was over there fighting for his snake-infested cotton field" (qtd. in "US judge...").

Wednesday morning, North Mississippi Rural Legal Services attorney Alix Sanders of Greenwood went to Belzoni to seek court action from Circuit Court Judge Arthur Clark Jr., who ordered that the students be bussed from the Parchman to the St. Francis Assisi Center in Greenwood Wednesday night. The buses were provided by the Center, after White refused to allow the use of MVSC buses ("US judge refuses to order reopening of Valley State"). Judge Clark said students "would be allowed to post bond not exceeding \$25 each, and those who could not post bond would be freed on their own recognizance" ("In Mississippi— Negro School Closed For 12-Day Period").

The students were finally released around 11 p.m. the next day and were picked up by buses from the Catholic Center in Greenwood, which was very supportive of their movement. There, they signed in, ate, and reunited with their parents waiting for them, or if they didn't have parents waiting to come get them, were put in homes in Greenwood (Whippel).

Gentle and Barbara Rouser were two of approximately 150 parents that waited for their children in the auditorium of the St. Francis Catholic Center in Greenwood. While Gentle waited for his eighteen-year-old son, Joseph Webb, he commented, "I almost think he's better off at Parchman than at MVSC. We couldn't get on campus Tuesday to find out where he was, and no one from the college would tell us" ("US judge..."). They believed it was unprofessional of White to act in such a way that prohibited them from any knowledge of their child's whereabouts.

Media coverage surrounding the arrest and incarceration varied. Dial Parrott's article, "Writ expected to be asked to free 889 MVSC students," was the front-page story of the *Delta Democrat-Times* on Wednesday, the day after the largest mass arrest on a campus in U.S. history. That same day, the *Clarion-Ledger* published a very short, conspicuously inaccurate article, "600 MVS Students In March Arrested." The same outlet responsible for the "Love-In" claimed that "an estimated 600 students" were arrested and "loaded aboard 10 of the black college's buses and taken to the Leflore County penal farm in nearby Greenwood, where about 250 were booked. Officers did not reveal where the remaining students would be taken, but there were indications they would be transferred to the State Penitentiary at Parchman." The *Hattiesburg American* and the *Greenwood Commonwealth* both featured the mass arrest on their covers and neither contained half as many inaccuracies as the *Clarion-Ledger*, a publication with well-known and well-documented ties to the white supremacist legislature.

In the report published by the college, the only "Example of Outside Interference" they directly call out and label as such (even though the report's second aim was to prove that "outside agitators" were largely to blame for causing the student unrest), comes in the form of a reprinted flyer published and distributed in Greenwood. It advertised a "MASS MEETING TONIGHT" (Wednesday, February 11, 1970) at Jennings Temple Church (a local black church) and asked:

What will the black people of Greenwood say to Dr. White and the white community? These kids were asking for rights already practiced in the major white colleges in the state of Mississippi. How can a black man deny his own people freedom? How can we allow them to be herded like cattle and like the Portuguese slave traders herded our forefathers? Is Dr. White – white or right – come out TONIGHT and let us save our youth from the destructive system that controls Dr. J. H. White, President of Mississippi Valley State College

Other than the transcript from Fannie Lou Hamer's speech, this short notice for a town meeting is the only "example" provided by the report of an "outside agitator." The notice was published the day *after* the students were arrested, however, and therefore does not fulfill the narrative goal of the administrative report. If anything, it shows the students had the support of many in the black community, whereas the support from the white community was reserved for the police and the State.

#### **Valley Closed & Local and State Reactions (February 11, 1970-February 18, 1970)**

In White's ultimatum regarding the closure of the school, he stated that buses picking up students would run on schedule Wednesday morning and classroom attendance would determine if the school remained open or not (Parrott, "Writ..."). After only 110 of the 2,500 students showed up for class that morning, he did what he had promised and at noon, he ordered the school closed, giving the students four hours to collect their things before the dorms closed at 4 p.m. (Leroy Morganti, "Miss. College Is Closed; Students Told to Leave"; "MVSC Campus Ordered Closed By President: Dormitories Must Empty"). White, who dealt with similar student unrest during February the year before, said "This could become an annual thing. It has to stop some time and I've decided this is the time" (qtd. in "Miss. College Is Closed..."). He did not ask any of the parents for their opinions on the way to best quell the protestors, and never got their insight into bringing a relatively undertrained sixty-man police force on the campus, or the Highway Patrol. However, he was unwilling to change some rules like visitation rights and curfews and permissions about going off-campus without first conducting a survey from parents to hear what they thought.

Students were reportedly prepared to continue their boycott, even with the school closed. The students anticipated the expulsion of student leaders following the announcement of a “selective re-admission process.” Gettis said that “we will approach whatever we do from a legal, non-violent angle, but unless we all go back to MVSC, none of us go back” (“US judge...”). On Sunday, 200 students demonstrated for a rally in Indianola, Mississippi, where Gettis spoke to the crowd, saying “We’re gonna do our thing and we’re gonna do it well. If White don’t like it, he can go to hell!” said Gettis at the rally. He continued, “Students are not asking to take over MVSC. All we’re asking is to better ourselves. We are asking to be well-educated” (qtd. in Boyd, “Students’ hearings delayed”). Dr. Richard Tucker, the ousted social science professor who had been the faculty sponsor of the SGA for four years, also spoke at the rally. He called the school “White’s plantation” and said that “between 65 and 70 percent of the students who leave MVSC haven’t mastered the fundamental skills of reading, writing and spelling. He said the school had a poor quality of instruction, and he blamed it on White’s ‘fear of good instructors’” (Boyd, “Students’ hearings delayed”).

Gettis announced that student protestors added a new demand to the original 30 – the removal of White as president. In a letter to the editor, Eugene McLemore (Class of ’65), Wilhelm Joseph (Class of ’69), and Julius Guy (Class of ’66) requested that the letter they sent out to their fellow MVSC alums be reprinted in the *Democrat-Times*. They wrote:

Dear MVSCians,

In an effort to alleviate one of the most crucial problems that ever existed at MVSC, we are calling upon each of you to join with us in an ‘ad hoc’ Alumni committee of MVSC to see that each of the students who was sent to the Mississippi State Penal farm be re-instated upon re-opening of MVSC... For many years we have graduated with no intentions of returning, or ever to assist MVSC in any way. Now we are calling on all of you to assist us in making something we all can be proud of. (“MVSC alums organized” [Letter to the Editor])

McLemore and Joseph were both law students at the University of Mississippi at the time. Joseph, who was the SGA president in 1969 and led the student boycott that year, went as far as to say “It is in the best interest of the state of Mississippi and all black people that J. H. White be removed from his position”

(Boyd, “Students’ hearings delayed”). In a meeting with current students, the Washington County Chapter of the MVSC Alumni Association passed a resolution Monday, February 16, backing the demands and calling for White’s resignation. The alums heard from the current students, who complained that White “was more interested in satisfying the state Board of Trustees of Institutions of Higher Learning than with attending to legitimate student grievances. ‘We can’t get through to see the man. He’s got his armed janitors guarding the way,’ one student said” (“Alumni ask resignation of White”).

The *Delta Democrat-Times*, in an attempt to appear balanced (or to give space to show what the opinions of white Mississippians were more generally), published a very different letter to the editor, printed directly under the letter from MVSC alumni. “Hooray for White” by “Name Withheld By Request” demonstrated sympathy for White and dismay at the students:

It is truly a shame that a minority can come in and upset a whole college (but just one rotten apple can ruin a barrel full). A student goes to college knowing the rules of that college (be he red, yellow, black or white) and if he can’t “shape up” let ‘em “ship out.” I say hooray for Dr. White or any other college president who has the intestinal fortitude to stand up against the agitators. It just does not make sense that colleges have been in existence with these same rules and the students never felt before that they had any say so or rights and far as telling the Administration what to do...

P.S. I am quite sure that everyone got the message that you [the *Delta Democrat-Times*] are not only encouraging civil disobedience, but violence as well.... (“Hooray for White”).

Although some in Mississippi’s white population, especially at the college level, did participate in the late 1960s progressive movements, the majority white opinion in Mississippi probably sounded more like this one.

The anonymous letter praising White was a response to an editorial published in the *Delta Democrat-Times* a few days earlier. The piece, “This Happened Here?” (see Appendix K), credited to no author but seemingly representing the opinion of the liberal newspaper’s staff, offered a commentary on the event, which they found “hard to believe happened in this nation this year.” The article continued, “Not one of the thirty points on their list could be considered even remotely radical. President J. H. White responded by turning Mississippi Valley into an armed camp.” Dial Parrott had already used that phrasing “armed camp”



in a piece published the week prior. The radicalism of the students was not in what they were demanding – which was basically just things that were already offered at almost every historically white school in the state – but in their collective action and willingness to challenge the people in power who refused to basic things like allowing women to be outside of their dorms past 10 p.m.

The *Delta Democrat-Times*, who had some of the few reporters on the ground when the arrests were taking place, said “the students remained peaceful, although the sight of janitors and other maintenance personnel armed as newly designated guards could hardly have increased their respect for the administration or its response to their demands.” President White may have been “acting on orders of the governor’s office or the state college board – to both of whom he has always been more responsive than to his students,” however it was of the opinion of the *Delta Democratic-Times* that such a response to a peaceful student demonstration “would have been absurd if it had not been so sickening” (“This Happened Here?”).

The staff at Hodding Carter III’s paper were not afraid to voice serious (and occasionally snarky) critiques of the racist power structure, though they themselves were hardly radical communists looking to overthrow the United States (which is what many white Americans thought about those who participated in the Black Power Movement thanks to the FBI and over a century of anti-communist hysteria). They wrote that because the arrested students “just so happened to be black, which alone explains how such a travesty of due process or intelligence could have been perpetrated” (“This Happened Here?”). The travesty of due process and intelligence meant 900 students who at that time had not yet been accused “of a single act of violence or destruction, were carted off like so many cattle to a place set aside for the lawless outcasts of this society” (“This Happened Here?”). Some of the “lawless outcasts” on the inside of Parchman’s barbed wire fences historically include former Freedom Riders and people like Clyde Kennard, who spent seven years there after trying to de-segregate the University of Southern Mississippi. From the inception of Parchman Plantation (or Parchman Farm or Mississippi State Penitentiary or whatever name is preferred for an 18,000-acre institution that imprisons primarily black bodies as inexpensively as possible, oftentimes for their entire lives, having transported them in chains away from their families, where major corporations and the state can exploit their labor at little to no cost), has functioned to keep dissenting voices silent and torture them in the

process. Parchman has always been – and will always be – an extension and continuation of American slavery.<sup>4</sup>

The very notion that 900 black students were taken on buses to Parchman, and many of them were put in their maximum-security unit which had no running showers, is as absurd and sickening as the authors of this *Delta Democrat-Times* piece knew it to be in 1970. Even if they were only inside for a day, the action itself illustrates what the institution represents and where political activism in Mississippi often leads: prison. What is almost as absurd and sickening as the actions of the State is the reaction of the “civilian” white community. The editorial concludes on a potentially pessimistic note: “If this does represent the future (and right now the response seems to be getting considerable support in the white community) every last one of us is in trouble” (“This Happened Here?”). In the short future, it wouldn’t be black police officers trying to maintain “peace” at Jackson State, and the consequences were even more tragic. The actions that took place there also received overwhelming support by the white community.

### **National Attention**

Local and state media coverage was mixed, and other than the *Delta Democrat-Times* and Leroy Morganti for the Associated Press, as Tyrone Gettis was well aware, they could not rely on local coverage for public support of their struggle. In Mississippi, in order to gain sympathy for the black struggle and make real changes, national attention tends to be a minimum requirement, considering the silencing and arresting power of the State. On Thursday, February 19 – nine days after the largest mass arrest on a campus in the nation’s history – the story finally hit national news. Philip D. Carter wrote a piece for the *Washington Post*, “The United States Had Role In Arrest of 894 Mississippi Students,” (see Appendix L) which was heavily circulated across the country. Carter’s article focused on the involvement of the federal government through the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) and the Justice Department. The arrest was not only the

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<sup>4</sup> See *Worse than Slavery: Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice* by David Oshinsky (1997, Free Press), *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* by Douglas A. Blackmon (2009, Anchor Books), and *Slaves of the State: Black Incarceration from the Chain Gang to the Penitentiary* by Dennis Childs (2015, University of Minnesota Press), to name a few.

largest of its kind and peculiar due to the demographics of the arresting police, it was also “the first ever planned with the advice and assistance of the U.S. Justice Department” ” (“The United States Had Role...”). The article claimed the events were “a victory for one of the strangest alliances ever assembled in the name of law and order: Valley State President White, Mississippi’s segregationist Gov. John Bell Williams, his all-white State Highway Safety Patrol, 58 black policemen from various cities in the state, and the Department of Justice.” The Justice Department’s role, until Carter wrote about it, had gone “largely unnoticed.”

The 1968 Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act created the LEAA, and states, like Mississippi, “created a state commission on law enforcement assistance its operating agency, known as the division of law enforcement assistance” (“The United States Had Role...”). Governor John Bell Williams asked Kenneth Fairly to be Mississippi’s director. Even though the state had a population that was at least forty percent black, the commission was 100% white men, most of them high-ranking in local and state law enforcement. In 1969, the commission applied for and received a \$288,405 “action grant,” which was used to fund the “task force” at Valley. Carter writes that “the arrests marked the quiet beginning of one of the Nixon administration’s potentially most volatile policies – federal ‘technical assistance’ in local suppression of ‘campus disorders.’”

Those involved in arresting the students were overall very pleased with its outcome: “As Fairly later reported, there was no violence, no injuries, and no pictures of ‘a white cop with his nightstick mashing the head of a black student.’ Gov. Williams, said Fairly, was pleased” (“The United States Had Role...”). Fairly also claimed that cooperation with the Justice Department was “excellent. We were in constant contact.” Department officials have “looked at this situation and think it has some application for use elsewhere,” he added. In 1970, the Justice Department, whom Fairly claimed they were in constant contact, was under the operation of John N. Mitchell, who was responsible for proposing things like “no knock” warrants for narcotics officers, “wire-tapping, opening first class mail coming in from abroad, and dragging newsmen into court in hopes of getting information about controversial figures” (“Incident at Itta Bena”). In a piece written in the *Edwardsville Intelligencer* out of Illinois, an unnamed writer says, “The actions at Miss. Valley, however, go a step further than any of Mitchell’s prior actions because they represent police state tactics used

to control legitimate dissent” (“Incident at Itta Bena”). The incident at Mississippi Valley was a part of much bigger, much deeper plan conducted by the nation’s powers-that-be to control and surveil its citizens. Mississippi has always been in a class among itself, but it has also always been just one piece (probably the most exaggerated one) of a much larger, racist whole.

Noting the lack of national outcry, the writer says, “If the incident had not happened at an obscure black college in the Mississippi Delta, it is likely that the national uproar would have been deafening” (“Incident...”). Part of this, they reason, is because of the all-white IHL Board and the all-white LEAA commission in the state. They continue, “So local reaction, which is usually the catalyst for national reaction, was almost certain to be limited. It should also be noted that the police action was certainly accepted as correct by the local establishment” (“Incident...”). Locally, outside of the most progressive people in both the white and the black community, the tactics used were not criticized or even questioned. And while there was certainly a number of people within the “local establishment” who were outraged, as there always have been, the white majority overwhelming supported it.

It wouldn’t be until May 25, when Joseph Lelyveld published a special piece for the *New York Times*, “Black Students Challenge the Order at Mississippi Valley State,” that again the story would gain national traction. In between those periods, coverage of the story was concentrated in black and smaller, leftist publications. Much more radical than the journalists and editor at the *Delta Democrat-Times* were those at the *Great Speckled Bird*, an independent, underground newspaper published in Atlanta from 1968 to 1976 started by students at Emory University. The city’s first underground paper fundamentally believed that objectivity was a myth created by the capitalist press, so their journalism made no attempt to appear distant or objective (Heckert, “The Great Speckled Bird Flies Again”). At its peak, this radical paper out of the South amassed 27,000 readers. Thomas H. Wirth covered the story at Mississippi Valley and was particularly critical of President J. H. White and the legislative body in Mississippi. In a piece published in the *Bird*, “900 busted in miss.,” he wrote an extremely frank, thorough piece on the situation at Mississippi Valley (see Appendix M).

The parallels between the story at Mississippi Valley and that in *Invisible Man* were not lost at the time: “As in all black, state supported colleges in the South, the main duty of the administration is, to

paraphrase Ralph Ellison, to ‘keep the niggers running.’ Or at least quiet and out of sight” (“900 busted...”). Wirth wrote that that when he was among the IHL board or the legislature, he came “with his hat in his hand,” “but on the plantation he is the supreme master. His role is ‘preserving the college for the students and protecting them from foolish ideas” (“900 busted...”). The students, under the leadership of an “Uncle Tom” learn the proper way to act under such an oppressive system and the “troublemakers” and “agitators” suffer the consequences. The “Uncle Tom” knows exactly what he’s doing though. As Wirth writes, “The student learns this aspect of the role as well. He learns to exploit weaknesses; he cultivates valuable ‘friends...’” (“900 busted...”). In learning how to succeed at the game of the oppressor, the “Uncle Tom” learns how and manages to survive in a system and society that oppresses them. And “[o]ne cannot but admire the exploits of a talented ‘Tom.’ Survival is no mean accomplishment. But ‘Uncle Tom’ survives by *using* the system; he cannot *change* the system. As long as the system survives, the whites who control Mississippi are content” (“900 busted...,” original emphasis). Wirth’s also wrote another piece in the *Bird*, “MVSC Whites Private Prison,” which got its title from a Tyrone Gettis quote. At the St. Francis Catholic Center in Greenwood, Gettis told parents, “They might as well name the school, ‘White’s Private Prison.’ You don’t *have* any constitutional rights if you go back.” The comparison of Mississippi Valley to a plantation or a prison was frequent among the most passionate activists and leaders and the comparison. These students were being actively surveilled by their administration they were being actively put in harm’s way. If students wanted to go back, they would have to agree to no longer participate in demonstrations. They would have to follow the rigid rules arbitrarily put in place that monitored what they could read, when they could gather and where, and even more for the women at the college. This college was run by a president feeding information to the Sovereignty Commission about his own students. The Sovereignty Commission was no “friend” to the black student. The IHL Board was no “friend” to the black student. The Mississippi legislature was no “friend” to the black student—but J. H. White would have black students at Mississippi Valley believe otherwise.

Dr. Richard Tucker, who was fired by J. H. White the day of the mass arrest for his support of the students and criticism of the administration, wrote a piece in the *Delta Democrat-Times* that was then published

in the *Great Speckled Bird* (“MVSC leaders must be deposed”; “State of MissEducation”; [see appendix N]).

Tucker, who taught at the school as a history professor for five years, was more critical of J. H. White and the entire administration than anyone else. His five years there, he writes:

permit me to state that Mississippi Valley State College is not a college in any sense of the word. It is a hinterland-situated on a spongy, water-logged swamp which provides fertile ground for the furtherance of ignorance and fawning servility. It is a mass of undistinguished, non-functional cinderblock buildings provided by the honky power structure as a show place, when they were well aware that the “separate but equal” doctrine would be declared unconstitutional. What did they (whites) care about the quality and kind of education received by blacks?

Dr. Richard Tucker, who was beloved by those in student leadership, likely influenced students to want more professors with doctoral degrees (and not just the honorary kind, like Dr. White’s) because of his exceptional instruction, high standards, and evident intellectual distinction. Dr. Tucker’s radicalism is evident in his words. He began his polemic of White saying, “The recent upheaval at MVSC was not a spur-of-the-moment manifestation. It was the product of years of misadministration, authoritarianism, non-vocal dissatisfaction among the vast majority of the faculty and staff, and inhumane and inconsiderate treatment of students” (Tucker, “State of MissEducation”). The words of the student activists are most valuable, but Dr. Tucker’s words, as their most vocal ally in the faculty and their advisor, are also most valuable in the analysis of the events that took place at Mississippi Valley in 1970. He was vocal and critical—and it cost him his job. Being fired allowed him to be as vocal with his arrant denunciation of the school and the system as a whole as he wanted, and he was given a platform to do that with southern publications like the *Delta Democrat-Times* and the *Great Speckled Bird*.

Outside of local papers and the *Great Speckled Bird*, a number of black publications were also closely following and reporting on the situation at Mississippi Valley. Johnny Bowles wrote a piece for *Afro-American* out of Baltimore, titled “Black Cops Used S. African-Style In Arrest of 894 Miss. Students: U.S. Helps Initiate New Miss. Tactic.” In the article, Bowles wrote:

South Africa, Rhodesia, and Portugal have until now set the standards for the use of black units of police and soldiers in an effort to put down the fight for freedom and self-determination of their brothers. The students arrested represented roughly one-third of the students at MVSC, while the officers who made the arrests represented half the black policemen in the state.

The comparison to South Africa, Rhodesia, and Portugal is clearly a critical one, and one other papers were not making. The *Afro-American* (AFRO) reached out to Lt. Willie Carson, who led the ad hoc police department at Valley:

Lt. Carson told the AFRO that he and the other men participated in the arrests because they wanted to and that they were in Itta Bena to enforce the law, and for no other reason. The men were sworn in by a state court. Lt. Carson told the AFRO the state of Mississippi demands professionalism of its police officers regardless of color. He said he believed the techniques pioneered at Valley State could be applied to similar situations all over the country.

It very well may be that the use of black police officers fortunately saved lives or “avoided bloodshed” at Mississippi Valley in 1970. Two years earlier, when Dr. King was shot, two students were shot by Highway Patrolmen. Three months later, bloodshot was not avoided at Jackson State when two black students were murdered by white police officers. The officers at Valley, like all police who do their job correctly, did not question of the validity or morality of the laws they were hired and voluntarily signed up to “enforce.” If anything, the students were lucky, considering the rushed recruitment of untrained janitorial and maintenance staff as armed officers fully equipped riot gear does not the administration, the State, or the government or the administration praise for their approach to silencing protests and perhaps quelling what they believed a black insurrection.

### **The Courts & the Return to Mississippi Valley**

The protest leaders, who did not anticipate being accepted back through the college’s “selective re-admission process,” always planned to take the legal route against the administration if need be. Student activists by that point were well-acquainted with the administration and the state’s approach to silencing those

who spoke out against them. The lawyers at the North Mississippi Rural Legal Services (NMRLS) were, from the beginning, working on behalf of the students. U.S. District Court Judge William C. Keady ruled Thursday, the day after MVSC was closed, that officials were in their right to close the school. He denied a request from the students' attorneys for an injunction ordering the college to re-open and admit students to their dormitories. He did, however, order the college to appear in his court in Greenville at 10 a.m. Tuesday "to explain what was meant by selective re-admission policies and re-registration of students." Keady said there was "a possible violation of the students' rights under the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution" which concerns due process of law ("Keady Rules In Favor of Shutdown of MVSC: Attorney Bails Out Students").

From the Sovereignty Commission files, there is a document with the heading: "LIST OF STUDENTS WHO WOULD JEOPARDIZE FUNCTIONS OF THE COLLEGE IF RE-ADMITTED BEFORE A HEARING" (SCR ID # 1-123-0-2-1-1-1). **It appears the list had been cut down from a much larger list because of the numbering. There are twenty-nine students listed but the numbers go up to fifty-seven. The numbers of the top ten are chronological, however, include number one and number two, Tyrone Gettis and Eligia [Elijah] McGee, as well as Beverly Wade, Theophilus King, and Margie Quince.**

The preliminary court hearings scheduled for Monday, February 16, 1970 in Leflore County Court on charges of "blocking a public road and disobeying campus security," were postponed by Judge Clark indefinitely, pending the results of the federal case before Judge Keady scheduled for that Tuesday, February 17 in Greenville. The hearing, which would determine if student's constitutional right to due process had been violated by the school's newly adopted "selective re-admission policy," was scheduled after student attorneys filed a motion for a temporary restraining order on the new re-admission order. Tyrone Gettis was first to testify but was interrupted when the motion for a delay was presented, and then accepted ("MVS Students' Hearings Indefinitely Suspended"). Keady didn't hear any testimonies until the end of August.

On February 19, the same day Philip D. Carter's *Washington Post* piece dropped, a three-day period of re-registration began on the campus of MVSC. White alleged that about 250 students registered on Thursday,



and he expected more the next day. Gettis claimed the registration figures the President was giving were inflated. “We have an SGA contact within the school that has valid proof that only 32 persons registered on Thursday,” he said. “This is an attempt by White to bring about disunity by giving fictitious numbers” (“MVSC Says Registration Looking Good”). The lack of trust and belief in misinformation from the administration was evident.

On Tuesday, February 24, some 500 suspended students showed up to the campus for a mass reinstatement hearing, where they were told by Vice President Lowe that, in order to be readmitted, students would need to sign a document waiving their right to due process, and then sign a pledge agreeing not to partake in any more protests or boycotts. Elijah McGee alleged that most students walked out of the gymnasium after hearing Lowe’s conditions to “either sign or withdraw.” He said that some twenty students did sign the documents and were then re-registered on cards stamped “Probation.”

While the students met in the gym, security guards arrested two students on campus. Silas McGee, a commuting student, was arrested for trespassing when he tried to return to campus and got into an argument with the officer at the front gate. Johnny White, one of those arrested two weeks before, was passing out leaflets outside the gym when he was arrested and charged with profanity and interfering with campus police on two separate incidents. Both were turned over to Leflore County Sheriff’s Department by campus guards. McGee was released later that day on \$100 bond, but Silas was still in jail the next day on a \$250 bond (Parrott, “Due process out at MVSC”)

In the conclusion of the “selective re-admittance process,” there were ten students expelled. Those students were Tyrone Gettis, Elijah McGee, Harold Dean, Silas McGee, Edward Walker, James Lowery, Roosevelt Yarborough, Robert Moore, Sol Washington, and Calvin McDonald (Jenkins, “Student hits MVSC chief”). These ten students were considered by the administration to “most dangerous” after the mass arrest, and therefore were not allowed back as students at Mississippi Valley by the administration.

Students, administrators, and some of the law enforcement involved finally took the stand before Judge Keady on Thursday, August 28 regarding the violation of their constitutional right to due process under the Fourteenth Amendment. James Lowery, a fifty-year-old WWII veteran and junior on the honor

roll before his suspension from MVSC, did not take part in any demonstration on campus and was never arrested or brought to Parchman. Lowery made the unfortunate mistake of speaking to reporters while he was heading back to his dormitory from the gym. They asked him what he thought about the student demonstrations, and he responded that he agreed with the demands. The very next morning, Lowery received a call from White, who asked him if he spoke to any reporters. Lowery answered yes, and J. H. White said that was all he needed to know and promptly hung up the phone. Lowery saw his words two weeks later quoted in *The Reflector*, Mississippi State University's paper after he later learned he had been suspended (Jenkins, "Student hits MVSC chief"). One of White's million friends had alerted him of the piece before it was even released. When Keady finally heard testimonies in August related to question of due process, Lowery was asked while on the stand how he would characterize President White. He responded: "the same way I would characterize Hitler, Mussolini and Tojo" ("Vet compares MVSC chief to three dictators of WWII").

The attorneys for the students (the plaintiffs in the case against J. H. White and the institution), who included Armand Derfner and John Brittain, attempted to show how MVSC administrators "systematically deny students their rights of due process, keeping the basis for their actions a mystery" (Jenkins, "Denial of rights is charged"). When Vice President Lowe took the stand, "he could not explain why the campus SGA was not allowed to function during the modified spring semester this year, and why there was no plans for it to function during the 1970-1971 term." During cross-examination, Lowe was called out for repeatedly looking down into his lap after being asked a question, and it becoming clear he was using pre-prepared notes.

By September 4, 1970, Judge Keady delivered his ruling and the students were officially reinstated after deciding the college-ordered suspensions had violated the students' constitutional rights of due process. The order called for trials for each of the ten students, to be held by an impartial faculty-student committee, with no members of the SGA or the administration, decided by a secret ballot. The students had the right to appeal to the IHL Board and subsequently to Keady ("MVSC students reinstated"). Keady said, "This court

finds it necessary to bypass the college administration and the SGA and it is regrettable because they must be brought together if this is to be a successful college” (“MVSC students reinstated”).

### **Conclusion**

Tyrone Gettis, now former SGA president, said, “The real test (of the case) was whether President White (J. H. White, MVSC president) could win this last-ditch effort to keep out of the school the symbols of student activism. Our presence on campus this term will be a victory for all students” (qtd. in Firmin).

Students may have won against the administration, but there was no margin for error.

By September 23, Elijah McGee was barred from the campus, three weeks after Judge Keady ordered his re-admittance. “Tuesday Keady ruled that Magee had breached college rules on two occasions by ‘going down the line in the cafeteria and not paying and not making special arrangements with school officials for credit,’ and by ‘staying in a dormitory without permission for four days’” (“Keady bars MVSC leader”). With the draft going on, students were incredibly mindful of the status as a student or not. The school sent a notice of his status as a non-student to the Selective Service Administration, which ordered him to report for induction into the Armed Forces in November. McGee “said the induction had been postponed until Jan. 15 and asked that school officials be ordered to tell students what they report to draft boards and prospective employers” (Rose).

By the end of 1971, J. H. White retired. Paul Estaver, who worked for the LEAA in Washington, D.C. and was called for advice regarding the task force early on, was named in the *Washington Post* article and wrote his own summary of the situation. In his report, he claimed, “I think it is pretty clear that the Mississippi officials recognize that the college president is not currently with the times and will have to retire as soon as it is gracefully possible for him to do so. I expect they may hold off negotiation until that can be accomplished this spring” (Estaver to Daniel Skoler, Director of OLEP [Office of Law Enforcement Policy]). White had lost control of the school and the entire student body. The IHL Board took care of that swiftly. Before leaving, it was announced a new, modern library on campus was going to be built and named after the founder of the school, which it still is today.

### CHAPTER THREE: THE STUDENT ACTIVISTS

Like Ibram X. Kendi's approach in his book, *The Black Campus Movement*, "the words, deeds, and perspectives of black campus activists" rest at the center of this project (4). Though periodicals, Sovereignty Commission files, and other outside sources are vital to any analysis of student activism at Mississippi Valley State, the words of the activists themselves prove most valuable. In addition to highlighting their perspectives in the pre-existing narratives, I had the privilege of interviewing six former Mississippi Valley student activists, and one staff photographer, all of whom were there in 1969, and most of whom actively participated in the boycott in 1970. Between June 2019 and March 2020, I spoke with: Charles Barron of Friars Point; Floyd Bailey of Itta Bena; Theophilus King of Jackson; Margie Quince of Gulfport; Eddie Carthan of Tchula; James McBride of Cleveland; Dr. Beverly Wade Hogan of Jackson; and Dennis Sells of Shreveport, Louisiana.

Because the interviews were conducted fifty years after the arrests took place, the first-person narratives collected are deeply personal and reflective, but understandably have holes and inconsistencies. All were conducted on camera, with the exception of James McBride's, per his request. In this chapter, in addition to highlighting where their first-person accounts fill in gaps left in the previous narratives, I also make space for parts of their stories that could not be included in the documentary. Knowing where the alumni came from before they got to Mississippi Valley State College, how they got there, and where they went after is beneficial to understanding and appreciating them as individuals and the impact of their activism.

This event has been the result of systemic erasure, and because of that, the stories of and sacrifices made by these young black student activists in the Mississippi Delta have also been erased. It is imperative

that this story in Mississippi and American history is remembered, and that these first-person accounts are collected and published online so we can continue engaging with this story. The transcripts of the oral histories, as well as the accompanying documentary, will be published online in order to preserve the first-person accounts of these activists and leaders in Mississippi. By making them free and accessible online I hope to encourage further research that goes beyond what has been done in this project and pre-existing projects.

### **Research Background**

My research with the eight individuals from Mississippi Valley stemmed from the work done during the summer of 2019 as a member of the Parchman Oral History Project (POHP). The project was organized and directed by Dr. Garrett Felber, a former professor of history at the University of Mississippi and a prison abolitionist, and consisted of five students: two graduate students from the University of Mississippi (myself and Jasmine Stansberry, a doctoral student in history), two undergraduates from Harvard College (Minahil Khan, who graduated the month before, and Courtney Delong, a rising junior), and one undergraduate from Tougaloo College (Kiara Johnson). The inaugural POHP focused on three separate sites – the University of Mississippi in Oxford, Mississippi Valley State University in Itta Bena, and Charleston, Mississippi – where, in the year 1970, challenging the white supremacist power structure resulted in mass arrests and temporary incarceration in Parchman Prison. That year alone, over one thousand black student activists were arrested and sent to Parchman, some as young as eleven years old, in the case of Charleston, where white locals fought to prevent the de-segregation of their public schools. This all took place in Mississippi that year before the deadly massacre at Jackson State University that May, when police attacked black students, ruthlessly murdering two.

After reading about the student unrest at Valley in Lelyveld's 1970 *New York Times* article and seeing the images in *Jet* Magazine, I became deeply interested in the story at Mississippi Valley. I contacted Mrs. Cal Henderson of Clarksdale, whose family I had a pre-existing and well-established relationship with from my previous oral history and fieldwork conducted in the Delta, and who I knew spent a number of years at

Mississippi Valley around that period with her husband, Leonard, who was a coach and educator there. I told her about the project and asked if she might know of anyone who was at Valley in 1970 who was involved in the student activism. Mrs. Henderson gave me the phone number of their very good friend, Coach Charles Barron, who then met me at their home in Clarksdale. We spoke briefly, and exchanged some historical documents with one another, and then he agreed to sit down with me for my first interview, which was on-camera in Clarksdale.

Charles Barron then introduced me to Mr. James McBride, who helped me identify Margie Quince in a photograph and gave me the name of the person who took all their photographs, Floyd Bailey. From a Sovereignty Commission file with the names of students they believed would continue to disrupt the normal running of the school, I looked them up on White Pages and called listed phone numbers, which put me in contact with Margie Quince. Surprisingly (and gratefully), they both picked up the first time I called and agreed meet with me in person about the event their student activism that took place. Two of the team-members from the Parchman Oral History Project also connected me with alumni—Kiara Johnson put me in contact with Eddie Carthan and Beverly Wade Hogan and Jasmine Stansberry put me in contact with Theophilus King. Finally, I met Dennis Sells while filming some b-roll during Valley's Homecoming Parade in October 2019. While taking photographs of some of his fraternity members, I explained what my project was about, and they introduced me to him. I have made contact with Wilhelm Joseph whom I hope to interview about their experiences in the near future.

The more oral histories I conducted, the more I realized they do not serve well as accurate historical documents, especially those taken fifty years after the main topic of discussion. Some of the gaps and inconsistencies in their stories meant additional archival research was required to fill those in. I traveled to the archives at Mississippi Valley State in Itta Bena half a dozen times, at least, as well as the Mississippi State Archives in Jackson, and the archives at Southern Mississippi University in Hattiesburg. Each individual archives all of which holds a relative treasure-trove of images and legal documents only accessible in person and only available for reproduction with a fee attached. Where and when I could, I quickly took photos with my phone of the archival materials so that I could actually spend time with them later. The evidence of this

story lies in the archives around the state, which closed swiftly March 2020, meaning some information is missing, and some archival footage I hoped to get was not possible.

### **Charles Barron**

Charles Barron was born and raised in Mobile, Alabama by his grandmother, who “worked for different people doing washing and cooking and cleaning.” She worked in the peoples’ houses and then on Saturdays, he would cut their grass. When he graduated from Mobile Central High School as a member of the first graduating African American class, the ceremony at the Convention Center in Mobile was delayed due to a bomb threat. Though Jim Crow’s dark cloud still hovered over his life, as it did for all black people growing up in the Deep South, he found solace in athletics, particularly football, baseball, and track. In 1965, Barron was awarded an athletic scholarship to Mississippi Vocational College, the first member of his family to graduate from high school and go to college. He recalled: “This was before they had university status. If you think about it, places in Mississippi for African-American people, especially college level, it was simply to get you ready to go back to the particular farms and do what you were supposed to do—what they thought you were supposed to do. But you know, some of us took advantage of it.”

The majority of students at MVC on scholarships attended on athletic or band scholarships. Wilhelm Joseph and Michael Wilson, who went to court to fight the revocation of their scholarships and expulsion, were both Trinidadian-born students attending MVC on athletic scholarships. It was on the track team that Barron connected with and befriended them:

Wilhelm Joseph was the catalyst and he was from Trinidad... and we had three from Trinidad.

Wilhelm Joseph, Michael Wilson, and Selwyn Swanston... And they were all on [the] track team and so they were great athletes. But, they said that those of us who were from out-of-state, they called us out-of-state agitators, you know. And in fact, one charge came up one time, it said that – I don’t know how they came up with this – it said “out-of-state transportation to incite a riot.” I don’t know what I transported except myself [*laughs*]. But “out-of-state transportation to incite a riot.” And we

all were from different places. We did have Tyrone Gettis and people like that. They were from Mississippi. But, the catalyst for all of that was Wilhelm Joseph.

Charles Barron said that student organizing in the late 1960s really took off around 1967, the year after Wilhelm Joseph heard Stokely Carmichael give his “Black Power” speech in Greenwood. What they initially demanded was additional library hours as well as “freedom for the young ladies because they couldn’t go to town without a letter from their parent,” as J. H. White proved most dedicated throughout his tenure to preserving the patriarchal hold over the young women at the college at every level of their lives.

Barron had much to say about President White: “Well, quite naturally, those of us who had some exposure outside of Mississippi, with his demeanor and his skin tone, we kind of thought that he was more of their overseer rather than [their college president].” White, himself an informant to the Sovereignty Commission, had informants in the student body alerting him of student activists’ meeting times and planned actions, undermining their protest and their safety. Barron did not know at the time but, after speaking with his long-time friend James McBride, a fellow alum, he realized “there were people inside our circle that actually turned us in. We did not know. But, you know, you’re always gonna have people like that. We had some people inside our circle that was telling him when we were going to meet.” This illuminates the depths and President White’s commitment to white supremacy (or at least his commitment to working for and with white supremacists to the detriment of his students) and the ways in which he repressed students that challenged the power structure. Though unsurprising given previous evidence, such measures taken by the president against student activists to quell dissent are missing from the earlier historical narratives.

Charles Barron asserts that the students arrested in 1970, which did not include him, have an entirely different perspective than those who began organizing before the assassination of Dr. King. He explains, “we were looking for one thing and we didn’t know we were starting a fire, you know. We didn’t really know we were starting the fire. We were just trying to get some student rights. And just, ironically, we had Martin Luther King’s death and that kind of got us in an uproar.” It was not until the murder of Dr. King that blackness was at the center of their movement, says Barron. According to him, “What we started at Valley had nothing to do with race issues. And if I keep saying that, it’s because everybody keep thinking that it was.



But it wasn't about race issues. The only race issue we had was with our president [*laughs*]. That's the only race issue we had [*laughs*]." While almost everyone looking back on the events saw race as a central factor, Charles Barron claimed the contrary. The students were not protesting for integration or voters' rights and their grievances were delivered to an all-black administration. Though the role of the IHL and the white leadership was not lost on them, the dynamics of having a black president in power changed the dynamics of protest at a black college.

Barron was unaware of what exactly was on his "record" until years later when he asked his lawyer and was told there was a charge from his college days for "destroying state property." He said:

I don't know today what property I destroyed but that's what they said – unless they were talking about a little altercation that we did have in '68 when Martin Luther King was assassinated.

Somebody came on campus and I don't know whether they were riding in a state car or what, but they made the statement: "Now what you people gonna do?" But they used another word, they didn't use "people." But they said, "What you people gonna do now that that person" – and they didn't use "person" – "is dead?"

After the hateful racist remark was thrown at the students, "it got kind of chaotic at that point." However, as he stressed a number of times, "prior to that it was simply about student rights, simply about student rights. That's all it was."

Though non-violent protest continued to be the approach among student activists at Valley, the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. really set the stage for more radical, black-centered demands. Overall, when students started protesting, they "didn't want to be violent or anything." Part of the reasoning behind their peaceful, nonviolent approach was, Barron believed, "for some of us, that was the first time we had not [just] a room [to ourselves], but the first time we had a bed [to] ourselves. Because most of us were from poverty-stricken environments."

When protesting escalated in February 1969, Barron was one of the fifteen arrested when police raided their peaceful occupation of the gym. Inside the gym, they sang "We Shall Overcome" and thought they "just really had it going on." Then, someone decided to use the restroom, and looked out the window,

where they saw somebody with a visor, a helmet, and a rifle. That student came back and alerted everyone in the gym, “Hey, we’re surrounded!” Then, the police forced themselves in and started listing a name of students they wanted to arrest. “And they started going down the roll call: ‘Wilhelm Joseph. Charles Barron. Tyrone Gettis. [Elijah] McGee.’ And Charles Barron just happened to be the only one present,” at least when they called the roll. And so, they put him on a bus to the Leflore County Jail.

Barron’s time in jail was “traumatic for the simple reason” that he was not given a telephone call, since his family did not have a telephone at home in Mobile. “So who was I gonna call, you know?” he remarked. On Barron’s experience in the jail, he said:

Can you imagine being in a jail cell with a window that you couldn’t see anything out of but a little river that comes through Greenwood? That’s all you could see was just the water. You had nobody to call. You couldn’t call if you had a phone and you didn’t have any resources at that time, so nobody knows what you go through and what went through your mind at that time.... But I just waited my time out and the people around us in Greenwood and the SCLC and all those people, they put their resources together and somehow I was released after about 18 hours.”

Once Barron and the other fourteen students arrested that day were released from jail, they, and the 198 other students suspended for their activism, stayed in Greenwood for a bit, in limbo regarding the status of their scholarships and suspension. Soon enough, they were told they had to move off campus, and that they would be taken to the bus station in Jackson where they could purchase a ticket home, wherever that may be. Naturally, some students did not go home. As Barron noted, “And some people had never been to Chicago, but they got tickets to Chicago. So they gave us tickets so that we could get out of that environment.”

When Charles Barron was suspended, he was already married and his wife, who he met at Valley, had family in the Delta. After working for a bit in Detroit, he returned to the Delta to complete what was still required to earn his degree, which was just his student teaching. Barron completed his student teaching

under Leonard Henderson.<sup>5</sup> Ironically, the same Dean Wicks who “was instrumental in giving me that vacation they gave me – when I say vacation, I mean “put me out” – he turned right around after I graduated and hired me at a place called Saints Academy and Junior College in Lexington, Mississippi.” Barron spent some time there, before taking a position at Coahoma Junior College and Agricultural High School in Clarksdale. Then, in 1976, he returned to Mississippi Valley State University, this time employed as an assistant coach in track and then football. He jokes, “and then I stayed there forever and ever and ever. I went there in ’76, stayed there until about ’82, came back in ’86 [and stayed until] ’88.”

Like all of the alumni I spoke with, Barron spent his life in various leadership positions. He was a principal in Marks, Mississippi for a number of years, before becoming superintendent in Shaw, Mississippi for fourteen years. Reflecting on it, he said:

I wanna say ninety percent of us did alright. You know, I look at myself, for example – a little boy from Mobile, Alabama who cut grass and sold newspapers on the corner and the only person from his family to get out of there and finish high school and then finish college, and then got several degrees, [one from] Delta State. And became a teacher, a college professor, a superintendent, a consultant for the state of Mississippi where we go into troubled schools. And we did all of those things and it was purely accidental, you know.

### **James McBride**

James McBride was born in Chicago, Illinois in Cooke County Hospital in 1947. He only lived above the Mason-Dixon line for the first three or four years of his life, because his mother “did the opposite of the Great Migration. She migrated back to Mississippi from Chicago.” Shortly after they moved to Mound Bayou, McBride’s mother married her high school sweetheart, and they moved onto a family-owned farm in Sunflower County. While McBride did not “experience the plantation complex,” he was always working on the family farm, growing cotton and corn, among other crops. Their community in Sunflower County was made up of black landowners who accrued their land from New Deal programs in the 1930s, which allowed

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<sup>5</sup> Leonard Henderson was expelled from Mississippi Valley for breaking their rigid curfew and dorm visitation rules and graduated from Jackson State as a result. Ironically, he ended up working for Mississippi Valley later, as did Charles Barron.

thousands of black laborers to purchase and own land in Mississippi. And as he stressed to me in our conversation, black land ownership was a much more common phenomenon than much of the discourse around racial prejudice in New Deal programs may have you believe.

McBride's entire formal education took place in the Delta. When he graduated in May of 1966 from Gentry High School in Indianola, he wanted to attend the University of Illinois-Champaign, but didn't think he could get in because Gentry was not even accredited at the time. McBride described his public education in the Delta:

You know, segregation was prominent. So the education we were receiving was inferior. Not to our knowledge. Now, while we had inferior building, dilapidated, torn-up books, I can put my education as a standard and I would compare it and compete with anybody. Because one thing we were taught was to be self-motivated and to be your own thinker.

After graduation, McBride went to Chicago to visit family, sparking his interest in going to school at the University of Illinois, when his mom sent him an application to Mississippi Vocational College. He attended Valley from 1966 to 1970, majoring in biology with a minor in chemistry. Four of McBride's five siblings went to Tougaloo College, where McBride thinks he should have gone sometimes, but knows it worked out pretty well either way.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, many students commuted if they owned a vehicle or took the bus if they lived close enough, but McBride lived on campus in a dorm. He thinks living in a dorm is the most important social aspect of a college experience because of the diverse group of people you meet from all over. He had a roommate from South Bend, Indiana and one from Water Valley. "But we stayed on campus. Four to a room. The students on campus were basically the students that contributed to the unrest because we lived it every day. We were there. We were close to the guys in the SGA. Although we might not have been a member, we were very active."

The student unrest escalated the Spring semester of his senior year. McBride recalls that the students boycotted class for a week and were subsequently sent to Parchman after the cafeteria dedication incident with H. M. Ivy. The only periodical I could find on the event is from 1968, and none of the articles

or documents from 1970 mention it. This does not mean McBride's timeline or narrative is inaccurate, considering misinformation in the published works is prevalent. It would make more sense if it took place in January 1970, as opposed to 1968. McBride described the campus unrest:

We stayed out of school a whole week. We boycotted class. And the reason for the boycott was we had just built a new cafeteria at Valley. And the cafeteria was named after—I think a man named H. M. Ivy. But when we got ready to have the dedication of the cafeteria, the President, which was J. H. White, summoned all the students to the auditorium. And we went over. And the man got up and thanked us for naming the cafeteria after him, and so forth. And in the process, he used a racial slur. And we attempted to get up and leave, and in our attempt to leave, we were told, 'Sit down, you can't do it.' Security guards, everybody blocked us in. So, some of us slipped out, some of us went out, some of us stayed in. But after that, there was a meeting and it was decided we'd boycott the school. And for that week, we stayed out of class. And finally, after shutting the school down for so many days, we were given an ultimatum. 'You go to class or you get off campus and you're going to jail.' We chose the latter, I guess [*laughs*] or the latter happened.

He remembered that some of their grievances included the curfew for women (or as they were commonly referred to then, "girls" or "coeds"), and that the guys could not be in certain areas of the campus after certain times, and other restrictions like that. He explained, "It was just a deprivation of college life. But it was meant to be well. The people who implemented those things, they thought they were doing something right. But it was just a new era of time for a new day, and we knew that." His old school bus driver from Sunflower County was a security guard at the school and warned McBride to leave the campus before the arrests took place, but he decided to stay in solidarity with the SGA.

The day of the mass arrest is rather vivid in McBride's memory:

It was a sunny day, it was a nice day for it to be the month of February and when I walked into the room, somebody said, "McBride, let's go. We're gonna march around the campus." So, we just ran out into the crowd and started to march. I think we started at the cafeteria and we marched all the way around. We went west, made the right in front of the president's house... and marched to

the gate. And by the time we got to the gate, security guards and all of the African American city police in the area – Greenwood, Indianola, Greenville, Oxford, everywhere else – they were there. And they blocked us. Told us we couldn't go forward. And we looked down 82 Highway and there was the Mississippi Highway Patrol. With riot gear. And we were ordered to sit down. And we sat down. And then they began to bring buses. And they started at the rear of the march and picked people up and were taking them to Greenwood to be booked for trespassing and blocking a public entrance. That's what it was. And by virtue of the fact that we were near the front of the line, we were the last to be picked up. They picked up everyone by the rear.

And they took us to the Leflore County Farm. At the time, they had a county farm. I think it was located out in Browning. They took us there and we went in. They got us off the bus and we went into the process center and they were booking us. We were fingerprinted. Picture taken. And when they got through doing that with us, it was approximately about, I guess it was twelve, one, or two o'clock in the morning. We were ordered to get back on the bus.

McBride remembers some of the interactions with Highway Patrol officers:

I can remember the Highway Patrol when we would show our I.D., if we were from Indianola, they would ask if you knew your sheriff was Jack Cecily.<sup>6</sup> “Jack know you over here clowning like this, boy?” I had a friend of mine from Tuscaloosa, Alabama, Danny Ray Steele.<sup>7</sup> A man grabbed him by his afro and turned his head around and said, “Boy, if George Wallace knew you was over here acting like this, he would come over here and beat your ass.” Then it was getting kind of scary. Then they put us in a cell. That's what happened, after they booked us, then some chaos happened. Some guys were getting all agitated because you know, some people have claustrophobia.

Next, James McBride said, “Well, after they got us out of the cell, they put us on a bus, I fell asleep, bus stopped, and I woke up and looked. And we were at Parchman, Mississippi. Welcome! Mississippi State Penitentiary. My heart did a flip. I thought, ‘Ah, hell.’” They took everyone's personal belongings and put

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<sup>6</sup> Spelling may be inaccurate.

<sup>7</sup> Spelling may be inaccurate.

them in a bag before separating the men and women, with the men put in the First Offenders Camp. His family, unlike most of the undergraduates, was able to get an attorney for him: “Got a lawyer in Indianola named Cooper. That was our family lawyer. A white lawyer. Wasn’t many black lawyers in the state at that time that we knew of. And they came over to Valley and went to Leflore County. Got my bond and bonded me out. I guess there was ten or twelve of us whose parents were capable of doing that at the most. Maybe twenty at the most.” When they arrived at gate from the First Offenders camp the prison gate, preparing to be released, a “man came out and said, ‘You gotta take ‘em back.’ ‘Take ‘em back for what? What is happening?’ Some judge from Leflore County had issued a warrant for our arrest. A judge from that same county had to issue a warrant for our release.”

An hour later or so, the students were once again put on a bus for release. He said, “I can remember the security guards saying, ‘Y’all wait and we’re gonna bring your stuff out to you. Give us your name and we’ll give you your personal belongings.’ [They had] my driver’s license, about ten dollars--if I had that much, wallet, meal ticket. I told them, ‘You can keep all of it. I don’t want none of it. I’m gone.’” He then got on the bus and was released into the custody of his parents.

After he got home, he called the friends he was with and they told him they needed to go back to campus. “And before we could get on campus, we were issued a citation that said we weren’t allowed back on campus. We could only go back to the campus to get our clothes.” He got his clothes and went to the Catholic Center in Greenwood with the other members of the SGA and student activists waiting on legal counsel regarding their next steps. After a few days there, he went home before a date was finally set for the hearings before Judge Keady in Greenville’s federal court to decide on opening the school or not. The students arrived at the courthouse and the Judge handed down his ruling, which they adhered to: “His directions to us was that he was gonna open the school back up and J. H. White was gonna have three times the power he had before he closed it. And we could come back and apply for re-admission—or we could leave. I chose the latter. I left. I left and went back to Chicago.”

McBride was only in Chicago for two weeks before he “got a letter from Uncle Sam.” He explained:

It said to come home to Jackson for a physical and that I was being drafted into the service. I was now I-A, which meant I was eligible to go to the army... Like I tell you, my parents had me a lawyer. He notified my parents that there was a law that stated if a student was without a school on an unrest protest, he had to be given one semester to get back in. And that applied to me. So I came back home and I went to summer school. I had to take classes that I didn't really need, but I had to be in school, a full-time student. And it was a blessing in disguise, because it really helped my GPA. And in the fall of that next year, the fall of '70, I took those courses and I finished.

Technically, McBride graduated with the class of 1971, even though he still finished his degree requirements that fall. He completed his student teaching in Clarksdale, at the same time Charles Barron was at Coahoma Junior College and Agricultural High School. There, they sold insurance together and fortified a friendship with remains today.

After McBride graduated, he worked in a cardiovascular research center in Illinois for a short while, before Dean Ivy at Mississippi Valley told him about a job in Shelby, Mississippi teaching school. He did that for nine years before he left for the private sector as a specialist for a natural gas company, working as a sort of liaison between the public and the corporation. Like so many of his peers, he too has held many leadership positions throughout his life. He was formerly a City Alderman in Cleveland and is now serving his third consecutive term as a Bolivar County Supervisor.

### **Eddie Carthan**

Eddie Carthan is a notable Mississippi native from the small Delta town of Tchula. There, he grew up on a farm owned by his grandfather, and today, is a fourth or fifth generation landowner in Tchula. Coming of age in Mississippi during the Civil Rights Movement shaped the course of his entire life. Particularly influential to Carthan was attending a freedom school, which sparked his own interest in the movement, and taught him how to demonstrate and register voters. Carthan ultimately credits attending a freedom school as the reason for why he stayed in the Delta working to better the quality of life for black people, along with listening to many speeches given by his two heroes, Fannie Lou Hamer of Ruleville and



Hartman Turnbow, also of Tchula. “I was able to see the big picture,” he said. Hamer first came to Tchula to speak during the struggle for de-segregation, when whites burned the local high school to the ground. Hartman Turnbow, delegate of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, who spoke along with Fannie Lou Hamer at the DNC in 1964, lived down the street.

Carthan affectionately refers to Mississippi Valley as “The Valley,” where he was a student from 1967 to 1971. He chose MVSC because, “Number one, I had friends to go there. Number two, they had instructors to come to our school to recruit us to go there. Number three, it was closer. I could go there, come home on weekends and work.” For many, Valley allowed those working in the Delta to either commute or live close enough to go home and continue to help their families with the work needed at home, while still earning a college education. Once Carthan got to Valley, it was clear the students were knowledgeable about the issues and “were seeking freedom, progress, along with an education.”

Carthan, like all of the alumni I spoke with, has reckoned with his perceptions of J. H. White in the five decades since proudly proclaiming him an “Uncle Tom.” Like Charles Barron, Eddie Carthan discussed the president’s informants:

The President had snitches and, oh, I remember all of them. You know, whatever we planned, they would come to the meetings. We plan a demonstration or sit-in on campus, they'll go back. The President knew before it took place. Just like in the communities when we had meetings at the churches planning marches, planning to go to register to vote. We had snitches in the meeting [who] would go back and they'd be waiting for us. Yeah. So they had a huge advantage on us.

Eddie Carthan has also worked to understand the motives of his black college president, and overall believes he was an incredibly positive influence and figure at Valley. When I asked if he remembered Fannie Lou Hamer calling him a “Nuclear Uncle Tom,” he laughed and said, “We all thought like that back then... I guess he was getting his orders from whites on how to suppress us, how to control us. And these are people he had to appeal to to get money and things for The Valley.”

The year 1968 was a fundamental year for Carthan, as it was for other students. Carthan further fills in the gap in the historical narrative with the story about the racial slur used at the cafeteria dedication

ceremony. He vividly remembers that day and H. M. Ivy, the I.H.L. Board member, who “had donated a lot of money to get that cafeteria built.” President White “was excellent in getting money from whites to do stuff for The Valley...So we had a program in the auditorium. And it was Dr. White’s way of honoring [H. M. Ivy] for his contribution.” Then, Carthan recalled:

When he [H. M. Ivy] got up to speak, he started calling folks n\*\*\*\*s. Uh, this a n\*\*\*a school. And when he said it the first time, people thought it was a slip of the tongue. And Dr. White, Mr. J. Hall Bolden, all these guys was sitting on stage with him and they started twisting in their chairs. And we out there started twisting in our chairs. He said it again. The third time, we got up, started walking out. And boy. I guess a few students stayed, but most of us got up and walked out when he kept using the word n\*\*\*a. Really? Oh boy. That could have gotten a whole lot nastier than it did.

Although we were [*laughs*] upset, we were students, we had to keep our composure at times like that.

Later in 1968, the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. turned up student activism “as high as it could be turned up at the time. Students all over this country, particularly black students on every campus began to demonstrate, protest...It was a time to let people know he didn’t die in vain... and voice our opinion.” There was one march that was originally organized by members of the football team, to the store that what located across from the campus, now a DoubleQuick gas station. White police officers lined up in front of the store, and Eddie Carthan joked with his roommates, saying “Well, we might get a chance to get some cheese and bologna from the store [*laughs*] if the riot break out.” The potential for riot to break out in the Mississippi Delta did not seem unfathomable in 1968 and two students *were* shot that night.

During that march, an altercation of some kind took place, and shots were fired, which hit two men in the legs. He believed the altercation was instigated by officers “looking for any reason” to arrest them or use unnecessary force against them, going so far as to shoot and kill. Before it happened, they had stopped and were just sitting and singing from across the street. He said “somebody might have said something, but we didn’t cross the road. We didn’t violate, we didn’t break no law, nothing like that. We were just singing freedom songs and they shot in the crowd.” Upon hearing gunshots, Carthan and his roommate ran as fast as they could, joking as they ran, but knowing that if they were shot, nothing would be done about it:

Our only defense was to run... We had no way of getting justice. No way. All of the judges was white. All of the policemen was white. All of the prosecutors was white. All of the newspapers was white. The television station was white. We had no way of getting justice. Everybody paint a negative picture. But that didn't stop Eddie Carthan. I was even more determined to get done what we were trying to do at the time. Yup.

The ways in which students protested against the power structure were numerous and varied in size and scope. As Eddie Carthan recalled, “there were some who would do things-- bust windows, go in the bathroom and put stuff in a bag and throw it [*laughs*].” When police came in 1970, he remembered “we was in the dormitory [*laughs*]. And we had some [*laughs*] people [*laughs*]-” The police would be standing out with guns in their hand and these guys would go and fill up a paper sack full of urine, or whatever. And they're rolling on that [*laughs*]. And then, when they hit them with that bag, it would burst [*laughs*]. They [*laughs*] had stuff all over them.”

The general treatment of students by the black police officers also varied from person to person. While others thought they were relatively mild, for Eddie Carthan, “They handled us real rough, real rough. And... a lot of these instances, these were black policemen who we called "Uncle Toms." And they were, you know. And they handle us worse than if they was, if they were white policemen. They had to show their strength. But anyway, we got through it.”

For Eddie Carthan, the incident at Parchman in 1970 was seemingly not as life-changing as it may have been for other students. His interactions with law enforcement have been more frequent than most, and since his arrest at Valley, has been targeted numerous times as a political figure. “I been in jail on every level – the local level, the city jail, the county jail. I've been in Parchman. I've been in the federal jail in Montgomery, Alabama when the Nixon crew was there.”

After Valley was closed in 1970, Eddie Carthan went to Chicago, where he worked two jobs, which was enough to buy him school clothes, supplies, tuition, and a car. He re-enrolled following his suspension and graduated the following year. Carthan then attended the University of Mississippi School of Law, where he was one of the only black students, but managed until he suddenly got drafted despite his I-A status. He

fought this, with the help of some of the same lawyers who defended the wrongfully arrested, detained, and expelled black student activists at Mississippi Valley State and the University of Mississippi in 1970 like Alix Sanders and John Brittain. He did not have to enter into the draft, but he left the University of Mississippi School of Law and moved back to Tchula.

Carthan still lives in Tchula, in “a fading columned mansion that once belonged to Sara Virginia Jones, the daughter of a local plantation dynasty” (Huffman). This home, which he purchased in the late 1990s, was owned by slaveowners and was presumably built by slaves. Though he grew up on a farm acquired through the New Deal, it had no plumbing. Now he lives in a home with three full ones. That fact is not lost on him. Reflecting on his life and time in Mississippi, he said:

I've seen a lot. A lot took place in old Mississippi. And now I'm experiencing the “new” Mississippi. It's been a lot of talk, but a lot of the doings are the same. We have just as much racism, hatred, discrimination going on right now as it did fifty years ago. It's covered. But it's in education, in the lending institution. If you go to a bank, try to get a loan, you have to have a lot more collateral—if you can get a loan. There's only certain types of money they loan black people, even to this day. And I don't have to mention the courts. It's just as racist now as it was back then. Blacks get twice more time. If you're poor, you don't get justice. If you're rich, you do. In the business world, same thing. It is on every level. There's still an uneven playing field.

His perpetual fight against the system and the power structure in Mississippi stems from his education at a Freedom School, and lessons learned from other radicals like Fannie Lou Hamer, Hartman Turnbow, and other veterans of the Civil Rights Movement. His activism continued and increasingly radicalized during his time at Mississippi Valley as he learned from professors, peers, and the many veterans of the Black Power Movement. Throughout his life, he says, “I had no problem standing up for what I felt was right. And I did not at no time allow Mr. Charlie of the Law or whoever dictate to me what I should do and what I shouldn't do, as long as I wasn't breaking the law. I made that decision.” Overall, he said, “You know, I think I played a role in making life better for the younger ones who came behind.”

Though being thrown into Parchman during his tenure at Valley, Carthan assures:

I love The Valley even to this day... Valley is known for educating the poorest and it has done that over the years. There are people who never would have gone to college and never had the money or the opportunity to go to college. Valley was there, right there in the Delta, where the poorest of the poor live. Valley reached out to those and Valley was an institution that catered to those. And I see Valley becoming an institution that continues to serve people who have fallen through the cracks, so to speak. They have produced a lot of great leaders, a lot of great teachers, a lot of great students over the years. I see Valley continuing to do that. They reach out and get some minds that are being hindered and they are developing those minds and training those minds and opening those minds. He is a member of his local committee of Valley State Alumni Chapters. "We raise money. We do things to support The Valley. It's academics, it's athletics. We support The Valley and I have no problem doing that for the Valley because the Valley has done a lot for me."

### **Floyd Bailey**

Mr. Floyd Bailey spent over three decades of his life at Mississippi Valley State as the school's official photographer. He was the only person I interviewed who was not a student, but a member of the staff. As an employee of the school, Bailey's proximity to both the administration and the students during the unrest made his position that much more complex. When he was hired, he was fresh out of college and still close in age to the students, so he was able to build relatively friendly, close relationships with them. Bailey maintained a certain amount of distance as an employee paid to document everything going on, not a participant in the activism. He said, "of course, I was so young, really you couldn't tell me from a student and everybody thought I was a student." Though he may have looked like a student, his opinion of J. H. White was pointedly different than that of student activists during that time. Though many alumni have reckoned with their perception of J. H. White upon reflection in the years looking back, it is clear Bailey always felt a sense of admiration for the college president that hired him. He said, "Well, Dr. White was a great man. He was a great educator and he did things back then that people are just doing now like bussing – picking up students. Well he had that going back in the '60s. And he really knew his job and he was a great man."

Bailey, as the students called him at Valley, was born in Montgomery County on a farm with nine brothers and sisters. When he attended college at Jackson State, his work-study was in the audio-visual department, which initially sparked his interest in photography. Shortly after graduating, he came to Itta Bena:

When I came to Valley in '63, when I was interviewed by Dr. White and Dr. Lowe, I really came here to be a dormitory director because I was looking for a job and I had a homeboy who worked here. His name is Dr. W. A. Butts. We are from the same hometown, so he brought me here. And after I was interviewed, I was sent to the library to work in the audio-visual department. And after I worked there a while they found out I knew a lot about photography. And then I was sent to the Public Relations where I worked there as a photographer in the Alumni Office. So it started there and once it started, I did most of the photography for Valley for thirty-some years. Everything happened, I don't care what it was, the president believed in documenting everything that went on at the school. So that's how I got started in that.

With all his time spent at Mississippi Valley documenting everything, Floyd Bailey knows the history of the college and the people who both attended and worked there. Though some of the details of the exact protests between 1968-1970 may have gotten a bit mixed up, Bailey remembers so much from those years. He was *the* prime witness to the events during those years, considering the level of access he had as a Valley insider and not an outside photojournalist, and his friendly relationships with both the administration and the students.

In 1968, Bailey was present at the dedication ceremony to H. M. Ivy, along with Eddie Carthan and James McBride, for the new cafeteria named in his honor (which as of 2020 is still named the H. M. Ivy Cafeteria). "And the speech that he made," Bailey said, "he used the n-word. I witnessed that speech. Yeah. He didn't use it one time. It was over and over."

From 1970, he remembers photographing Fannie Lou Hamer when she spoke on campus, one of which is included in my documentary. He said, "Well, some pictures I think are history and some can tell a story of the school." His photographs serve as historical pieces of evidence, and they also serve greatly in

telling the story of Mississippi Valley State University. Without the photographs made by Floyd Bailey, the visual record of this event at Mississippi Valley would be almost non-existent (not to mention that without his photographs, the documentary portion of this project would have suffered immensely). The visibility of this moment in 1970 can be credited to Floyd Bailey. Seeing the photographs of the armed black officers with riot gear and the photograph of Fannie Lou Hamer on stage next to SGA members like Theophilus King invites others to ask more questions about what happened there.

### **Dennis Sells**

Dennis Sells was a sophomore when he was taken to Parchman on one of the buses from Mississippi Valley. The business owner was born and raised in Shreveport, Louisiana, where he lives today with his wife (whom he met at Valley). In high school, he played in the percussion section in the marching band and when his entire section was offered a band scholarship to play for Dr. Russell Boone's band at Valley, he seized the opportunity to get a college education cost-free. When Sells first arrived at Mississippi Valley as a freshman in August of 1968, it was only a few months after the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr in Memphis, which was only two hours away from the campus. When Sells arrived as a teenager on the campus, he said it "made me feel as though I was walking into somewhat of a war zone" because of all the unrest.

Before going to Mississippi Valley, Dennis Sells was well-aware of the protests taking place across the country. When he got to Valley, he saw a campus deeply and actively involved in the larger movement for racial equality. As soon as he could participate in it himself, being a young teenager at the time, he said he "felt compelled" to do so.

In addition to playing percussion in the band and active in his fraternity, Sells recalled:

I felt an obligation to get involved, you know, because I could see that it was just wrong. It was just injustice, you know, the way that the blacks were being treated at that time. And then what I wanted to do is just be a member of the group, of the coalition of individuals that decided to stand up and protest for what I thought was wrong. In fact, what I thought was right.

The value in collecting these stories while we still can is evident in the former students' memories of people like Tyrone Gettis, who unfortunately is no longer here to speak on his experience as a leader of this important movement. The descriptions of Gettis from former students varied from the characteristics described by the college administration:

Let me say this about [Tyrone] Gettis and Wilhelm Joseph—those guys, when they came to speak before the public, they had knowledge about what was going on with Mississippi Valley State College and they had the...student population's full support. And I mean they [were] both elegant speakers, especially Gettis and his voice resonates to the point where people believe what he was saying and we were following him totally. I don't know of anybody that I knew that was not behind the movement.

Sells admits he knew nothing about organizing before arriving the MVSC, but after listening to student leaders like Wilhelm Joseph and Tyrone Gettis, he felt compelled to show solidarity:

I heard what was being said and I agreed with the content of messages that were being put out there. And by my agreeing with them, certainly my only way to support them, was to go with them. So of course, I banded together with them because I thought that what they were talking about was in my best interest.

When they were in the midst of the class boycott in February 1970, Sells was prepared and enthusiastic about participating, even though he was on a band scholarship. When he looked back at the list of demands in our interview, he said, “These are things that were just available to the white campuses without any doubt and here we had to stand up and ask for them and still not able to get them.”

Dennis Sells did not remember the cafeteria dedication ceremony to H. M. Ivy (which would make sense if the ceremony occurred in January 1968, before Sells got there, as the periodicals suggest). Sells does remember, however, during the student unrest or the “riot” as he would sometimes refer to it, that students tore down some of the letters off the H. M. Ivy Cafeteria. He recalled it was “a result of us not getting a response to our request for a name change.” Some of the letters being torn down by students was the only vandalism he remembered hearing about during the boycott.



The ride to Parchman was long, that much Dennis Sells recalled. Once inside, the young men he was with were not put in a cell but “a massive gymnasium,” with hundreds of beds. Being inside Parchman, Sells recalled how cold it was, but nothing stood out in his memory more than the food. All they were served was breakfast, which was just eggs and syrup. The eggs were full of shells, which seemed “on purpose” just because of the sheer number and the syrup didn’t move when you moved the plate.

During the period of school closure, Sells went through the protocol to be re-instated as a student. He was “happy and ready to go back to school.” Sells said “it was the best decision I ever made going back to that university, getting my education. Because, believe me, it’s helped me make a lot of money [*laughs*].” Sells graduated with a degree in business and minors in accounting and management. He returned to Shreveport, where he is very active in the MVSU Northwest Louisiana Alumni Association. He encourages students to go to the institution and says if he were given to opportunity to go again on a scholarship,

### **Theophilus King**

Dr. Theophilus Cleotis King was heavily involved in the movement in 1969 and 1970 at Mississippi Valley, where he was in the band and served as SGA chaplain. His family shaped his initial pull towards activism. Dr. King’s grandmother delivered him at her home in rural Clay County, Mississippi in 1949. His parents started working in education (his mother was a teacher and his father a principal) shortly thereafter and moved to Bay Springs in Jasper County, where he and his five brothers grew up. He remembers seeing the image of Emmett Till’s beaten face when he was just a boy: “I was six years old then. And to look at this young fourteen-year-old boy's face—a good looking kid—had been beaten to a puff. His face must have been five, six times bigger than his normal face because it had been beaten so merciless[ly]. And all of us in my grandmother's house got around the radio and everybody had picked up the *Commercial Appeal* from Memphis and we looked at that picture.”

The public education the alumni received during segregation was unanimously described as exceptional, in spite of the clear systemic inequalities in Mississippi’s white supremacist school system. King said:

the white [people] took most of the money for the school system and left us with what was left over. But in spite of that, our teachers taught with a high level of individual and collective efficacy. And their thing was: we are going to use what we got to make you all the best that you can be. And we were always told coming up by our teachers that you can be anything you want to be. And that's why a lot of people before my generation and during my generation did not allow Jim Crow to stymie our pursuit of happiness.

When his school, Bay Springs Vocational Attendance Center, formed a band when he was in the eighth grade, his father told him to play the flute because that was the only instrument they had left. In high school, he played the piccolo and his best friend, Charles Thigpen, played the clarinet. Influenced by King's older brother, who started at Valley two years earlier, Theophilus and his best friend, Charles, decided to audition. They were both awarded band scholarships to Mississippi Valley, and to save him and his family money, he enrolled. King majored in science education with an emphasis in chemistry while playing in the band.

The culture at Valley under White's leadership, as King remembers it, was infantilizing more than anything else. King explains:

Every student on campus, to him, was a child not growing into adulthood. You could have been twenty-two. You could have come back from the Vietnam War. You could have been a forty-year-old guy who fought in the Korean War. You were still, to him, a child. And because he was expected to be called "Daddy White" and his wife was called "Mama White," then it was a situation that we were children made to do what we was told to do. That that was the culture there.

That's why we did not get any respect when we made our presentation because these are toddlers giving us these demands as far as he was concerned. And that, and so that was their attitude, which was reflective of the Institution of Higher Learning. That's the kind of culture that they perpetuate and that's why they hired him and such people as him to serve on as college presidents on that.

In 1969 in the summer between his junior and senior year, King went to New York to work with the Brookhaven National Laboratories to conduct research and publish a paper on kinetic chemistry. He spoke

about the impact of working there that summer: “I met people from Brown University, Harvard, Columbia, Yale, and then talking to them, I realized that we can run a conversation on the same topic with the same amount of energy and intellect.” At the same time, he and other students saw the differences in the quality of the institutions as a whole:

And they could see those major universities and see how sprawling they were and to know about all of the faculty with PhDs...But when we come back to Mississippi Valley State, we see that it's puny. It's puny when it comes to faculty members with PhDs, it's puny when it comes to facilities and with lab equipment. It was just puny compared to those schools. And we were asking-- well, we really didn't have to ask that question. We knew that it was because of the color of our skin and the texture of our hair... And that was true at Jackson State University. It was true with Alcorn. And it was true with Mississippi Valley State University. So, our push was for equity of funding. If we are going to be a state school, well, give us the equity that is needed.

Students felt compelled to bring their grievances and demands to the administration because they clearly saw the discrepancies between the black colleges in Mississippi and the white colleges in Mississippi, and amplified that much more when put in comparison with the elite historically white schools in the Northeast, the students were also “emboldened” by the “rising tides of activism nationally during that time.”

Dr. Theophilus King said:

We grew into that, coming out of the fifties and into the sixties...We had the Civil Rights Movement, you know, back in '64, before all of that culminated. Now, here it is upon us, what are we going to do in that here and now to make changes better? Martin Luther King with doing what he was doing, Roy Wilkins was doing what he was doing, Malcolm X was doing what he was doing in their leadership. And the point is, all this is on a national level. Now, what are we going to do in our here-and-now? What are we going to do in the immediacy of our time and place? That was very important.

King and other students were fed up with the blatant paternalism and dehumanization at the hands of the administration. The students wanted to be treated like adults, just like the students at the white colleges were treated like adults. So, he recalls, the students:

diplomatically and systematically drew up some grievances and we presented them to the president and the administration for them to address those things...hoping that they would enter into negotiation with us. But they saw us as toddlers. They saw us as children who had a lot of gall to be coming to [them], telling them – the administration and ultimately the IHL – what to be doing for [our] own education.

The responses the students immediately felt is that was “been going on since 1620 when the first black person came over here, and they are perpetuating this.” Beyond that, it was the continuation of the Black Codes and Jim Crow. They became increasingly aware and unsettled by the premise of the public black colleges in Mississippi, which were “only formed in order to teach us to work with our hands, and not to be [on] par with everybody else in this country.” The students were looking for something different out of their black college administration and were reimagining their black college. The students were done with the Booker T. Washington model, as Dr. King demonstrated: “And then we looked at Tuskegee, and the one who started Tuskegee, the whole thing was use your hands, not necessarily use your brain. We thought that that was stupid.” The students made it clear they wanted to be out with the old and in with the new.

Dr. King’s interviews also illuminated how the students felt about having their 1969 sit-in called a “love-in:”

So we use the techniques – and that was the sit-in – to demonstrate, and we was not playing. They told all kind of lies on us, saying that we were having “love-ins” and all that kind of stuff, and that was the biggest lie. Because what they are trying to say is that, “The only thing these black kids wanted to do is to have more sex,” which was a bold lie, and trying to further discredit and put out these false, fake stereotypes upon us to discredit our efforts. And we knew the integrity of what we was doing even back then. And the people must understand that black folks are some of the most conservative people that are out there, you know... So then we knew what we was committed to.

And we were so intense about it. Even though we were young, we were not carried away by our hormones... Because it was fierce what we was doing. It was intense... what we was doing. And our hormones did not overrule our desire to raise the standards of the schools where we were.

Students always believed what they were doing was important and radical at Mississippi Valley, and they were well aware of white supremacist tactics to discredit them. They were also aware of the goings on at other public black colleges in the state. Dr. King said, "the same thing was going on at Jackson State, the same thing was going on down at Alcorn." King had classmates at the other black colleges and as he said, "we didn't have cell phones, but we knew what was going on... it was permeating the whole African American communities on campuses."

On the day of the mass arrest in 1970, Dr. King was instructed by the other SGA leaders not to get on the bus to jail, but to help get the nearly a thousand students out of wherever they were going. He called his fraternity brother, Wilhelm Joseph who was at the University of Mississippi School of Law and together, they contacted Alix Sanders at North Mississippi Rural Legal Services.

Although King did not go to Parchman himself, his peers told him of their experiences:

But we know that the tactic for putting people in the bus and putting them in the prison... Just think about it, going to Parchman in the black community for 100 years was... a very dreaded thought...because we only thought about that place having been a place of dehumanizing. And then whether you had done something really bad or not, when you went there, you come back broken... And that's where a lot of black men was sent for a minor issue. You might have been looking at a white woman crooked, you might be looking towards a white woman and end up being put in prison for some false allegations, you know, and it worked... The thing about it is, it's very traumatic because... you [may] not have done anything wrong but exercise your constitutional rights, and then be taken to prison. We knew that that was fear tactics, that was a tactic of intimidation to try to break the spirit of the kids so "you Negroes won't do this anymore in the future." But it didn't work.

The constant threat of the Mississippi State Penitentiary loomed over all black families in Mississippi. They were well aware of the propensity for the State to throw black men (and historically women) inside its walls

for no reason other than challenging the white supremacist power structure. Nevertheless, Dr. King said, “I saw myself as a soldier for the cause” and was committed to seeing it all the way to the end.

In 1969-1970, King was a senior and the closing of the school set his graduation back a year. After graduating in January 1971, he entered Mississippi State University as a Ph.D. student working towards a degree in kinetic energy. He worked as a high school science teacher and later school administrator. While doing that, he obtained a Master’s in Education and a Ph.D. from Jackson State University as well as three years of certified training at Harvard University in education. Dr. King worked in Jackson public school system until 2014 and is a retired pastor of St. Luke’s Presbyterian Church.

Dr. King, like so many other alumni who were student activists in 1969-1970, still thinks positively about his former college:

I love Mississippi Valley State University. You know, that's my alma mater. Have no hatred, no resentment, and no regrets. Cause I could have accomplished anything that I wanted to accomplish by going to that school. And the things that I did accomplish was because of the individual as well as the collective teacher efficacy of the instructors that was there. And to know that they gave us the best quality that they had, in spite of the inequities delivered to the school by the IHL. I love Mississippi Valley State.

Years later, when the legislature proposed closing Alcorn and Mississippi Valley and merging them with Jackson State, the same people involved in the rallies against that in Jackson were that same ones fighting in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Dr. King was there to continue to fight for Mississippi Valley and equal education for black students in Mississippi.

### **Margie Quince**

Margie Quince’s face as Tyrone Gettis was turned over to the Leflore County Sherriff was a look of fear, anger, and disbelief. The moment Gettis was turned over, with Quince next to him, was published in *Jet* Magazine and circulated to its readers across the country. She was heavily involved in the movement and the

SGA during her time at Mississippi Valley and as a woman, she offers an incredibly important perspective to the narrative of events that took place at Valley.

Quince was born in Bay Springs, Mississippi on August 9, 1949. Her grew up in Gulfport, on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, which was notably different than the Mississippi Delta. childhood was rather sheltered growing up in Mississippi, and her parents actively tried to keep it that way, as so many black parents did. She was six years old when Emmett Till was killed which was “a little before her time.” She explained:

sometimes when you're living in things, especially historical events, you don't realize the impacts they're having, especially in places like Mississippi – because...information was not that available to us and the information that was available came from newspapers and television that were biased. You know, there were biases in favor of the state. And so you rarely got a chance to hear the other side of the argument.

Quince ultimately decided to go to Mississippi Valley because her brother was a student there and she wanted to save her parents money. From Valley, she earned a Bachelor of Science in social science with a minor in sociology, which she said, “I think that's what [*laughs*] most of us got in in the ‘60s, you know.” Quince explained:

In the South – and I think it's just part of the black culture, period – if you get an education there is always, always a demand that you give back to the community. And, at that time, during the ‘60s, you know, we were being provided with information about how bad things were for black people, how much work had to be done, and not just integration, but we had to develop solid economic foundation. We had to get really, really, really serious about sending our kids to school and developing our neighborhoods and that whole thing. So, a lot of us went that route.

Quince was always someone who loved and had a good time at school, but she also remembered how difficult it could be. She said, “of course it was a very, very conservative school when I first enrolled there. Girls could not go off campus. They couldn't have cars. And I remember we had to go to Vespers every Sunday, I think, at 5 o'clock. So, they took that whole parental thing – *loco parentis*, I think it's called –

very seriously.” Men were restricted at Valley, “but at least they could go off-campus.” The women were limited to the boundaries of the campus in unincorporated Itta Bena six days a week. On Saturdays, they were allowed to get on a bus with a chaperone (“we were always chaperoned”) to Greenwood, where they could shop. When Quince first arrived as a freshman, the boys were not even allowed to visit the girls’ dormitories. It was only during her junior year that men could even sit in the lobby. Additionally, to the chagrin of the young adult college students at Valley during this time:

they were fairly strict, fairly strict on your little courting habits too. We could only court around the campus, but they were watching that. They watched that activity fairly closely. Yeah and I think that's where some of the animosity towards the security guards came in. You know, kids somewhere around the corner kissing, and the security guard shows up and, I think you could give ‘em discipline for that, at one point.

And if a woman actually did get pregnant, the college would kick her out or put her on some kind of restriction. Quince recalled the issues students had with the security guards, who were “a little heavy-handed.” To Margie, this “was strange, because, I mean, these were these are kids from aspirational families that, that just didn't tolerate a lot of bad behavior, so I don't know why they thought they had to be so heavy-handed when dealing with the kids.”

Even though she may have been opposed to the level and means in which they were restricted, Quince understood why the school had some of the rules it did:

I did understand...it was the Delta. You had to be very careful with your students because there was so much danger surrounding the school. You know, people were killing Freedom Riders and young people that came to Mississippi to help with voter registration. They were killing those kids. Remember we were on the fringe of Jim Crow. Things were getting a little bit better, but white people in Mississippi still thought that they were supposed to govern black bodies...

And if a kid does something that kids typically do, well they could be harmed by engaging in that, you know, adolescent behavior. And I can understand [why] the school was very, very protective of



its kids, because it knew the environment that the school was in and they knew it would be dangerous for us to be out there acting like kids normally act because we could get hurt.

Even with an understanding of the oppressive conditions around them, students were still ready to take on the administration for their over-restrictive nature. When they did start organizing, they felt relatively prepared to do so, because as Quince said, people in Mississippi and in the South in the 1960s were used to it. The issues Margie was particularly concerned with were how restrictive it was for girls. She said, “I just didn’t think that if you’re preparing somebody to go out in the world, I mean you can’t lock them up and then when they graduate, then you throw them out there. Kids have to be gradually introduced to what’s out there.”

When it came to the actual arrest in 1970, Margie Quince was there – and there is plenty of documentation to prove it. She knew it was all planned because of the black police officers that came from all over the state. Upon reflection, Quince says, “Now that I think about it, I think that was a good thing. ‘Cause again, that was the Delta, it was Mississippi, and it was the South. And kids could have gotten killed if they had had the wrong people there.”

Inside Parchman, Quince remembers not being allowed to call her parents, because the officers said they were not being arrested, only detained. While there, she said, “I know we had to plead for little things, like feminine hygiene products and that kind of thing.” How exactly they got out is not exactly clear to Margie, who believes Fannie Lou Hamer played a significant role in their release. When Quince did get out, she stayed with a sympathetic family in Greenwood that housed both her and her best friend, Annie Greenwood for about two weeks.

Margie thought a lot about the media coverage this story received, which was not very much. She said, “We knew that the Greenville newspaper [*Delta Democrat-Times*] was very sympathetic to our cause and if not exactly sympathetic to our plight, they were pretty even-handed in their reporting rather than the Jackson newspaper [*Clarion-Ledger*].” Quince remembered the article about the “Love-In” very well:

The first time we staged a demonstration, we had a sit-in, well a sleep-in, some kids called it... We decided to occupy the gym and we stayed there overnight. Well, it was not reported as a sit-in, a protest, or a demonstration. The Jackson newspaper made it seem that we were having some kind of

a teenage orgy or something. Yeah, they kind of made it a little, a little sleazy. Yeah, kids. And that's what they were able to come up with, paint it. But these are the same people that didn't have a problem with the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission, you know. So what can you expect?

Margie Quince's name does appear in the Sovereignty Commission on a document with a "list of students who would jeopardize the normal functions of the college if re-admitted before a hearing." Quince is listed as number ten, after Theophilus King and Beverly Wade. Other than the *Delta Democrat-Times*, Margie doesn't remember other Mississippi papers reporting on it. She always thought it was "something like a blackout" because "that's what they did back then when there were controversial things happening with black folks." Beyond Mississippi, Quince remembered the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* both had pieces, as well as a paper in Atlanta, "and, of course the little *Jet* thing... but Mississippi papers didn't print anything."

The erasure of the story at Mississippi Valley was systemic and tactful, and those involved knew that. Quince told me, "I would like to give you a good overview of how things transpired with the Parchman episode, but I can't because, like I said, if you're in it, you just don't know what else is happening around there."

Because of the erasure, there is value in telling these stories, even fifty years later. Quince told me, "the sad part about it, we never had anybody come around and kind of chronicle these things for us. I mean, you're the first person that I've heard that wanted to even, you know, do a paper, much less a documentary on what happened to us up there."

After returning to Valley and graduating the next year, Quince moved to Houston where she spent most of her adult life. Just recently, she moved back to Gulfport to take care of her mother, which allowed me to interview her in person twice. Fifty years later, Quince is as politically-minded as she ever was, while maybe not as active in the streets protesting as she might have been fifty years ago. For like-minded individuals, it is easy to engage in hours of conversation with her about the state of Mississippi, its politics, and all the work that remains.

Margie concluded our first interview saying:

when I talk to these kids that went to prison with me... it's almost, you can hear yourself talking when you hear them talking. They're always talking about politics, they're always talking about race relations, they're always talking about Mississippi and how it needs to be improved. They're very, very conscious—like the kids say, “woke.” Like, we stayed woke. Yeah, we did... Some of my ex-classmates...we're Facebook friends, and they post about two things: they post about religion and they post about current events. That's it. Religion and current events. So, we're still woke. We may be seventy now, but we're woke, yeah [*laughs*].

### **Beverly Wade Hogan**

When Dr. Beverly Wade Hogan arrived in Itta Bena in 1968 from Crystal Springs, Mississippi, she was “anxious to experience freedom” as a young sixteen-year-old. She had been impressed by the beauty of the modern-looking campus and swayed by people like her best friend, Tyrone Gettis, to attend Mississippi Valley State College. Like so many of her classmates, Wade was always convinced by her family that college was a necessary route and education was the way to not only serve yourself, but your community. And like so many of her classmates who grew up in Mississippi during segregation, Beverly had teachers who made the best out of situations with comparably inferior resources.

As soon as Beverly enrolled, she became very involved with the student government and with other student activists. She was already best friends with Tyrone Gettis, whom she grew up with, and on Wade's first day on campus, she met Wilhelm Joseph and they became friends (which they remain to this day). She was elected as Freshman Class President and was then elected as an officer to the Student Government Association.

The “unrest” all started, according to Wade, because students wanted more speakers on campus during the fall of 1969:

We got involved in some of those things and that we met some resistance from the administration there because we wanted to bring speakers onto the campus and that was denied because they

thought it was going to be too... radical and controversial, and the president did not want the university involved in those kinds of things during that time.

The pressure they put on the administration finally led to Fannie Lou Hamer speaking there that February. She later participated in the sit-in in 1969 and was one of the 196 students suspended as a result.

In 1970, when the tension was increasingly building between the administration and the students, she remembered an exchange with herself and Dr. White:

I remember Dr. White trying to call each one of us individually that he thought he could have some influence with. And he talked to me one day and he told me what a pretty young girl I was and that I just didn't need to be involved in that, and that he was my daddy. And he was, you know, all the students' daddy. And I said, "No, Dr. White, I have a father and I didn't come to college looking for another one." And I remember that so well, walking away from him... He wanted the students to call him 'Daddy White.' And he wanted us to call his wife "Mama White." And some students did that. And I could understand, you know, at the time, when students are away from home, [some] might've been engaging in that for the right reasons.

Dr. Beverly Wade Hogan decided not to return to Mississippi Valley after being expelled. She did not apply for re-admittance because she had already decided that she was headed for Tougaloo College outside Jackson the following year instead of returning. In 2002, she became the first woman to be named president of her alma mater, Tougaloo, which she served as until June 2019. Since becoming a college president herself, Dr. Hogan says she's come to a kind of "reckoning" with Dr. White. She said:

it took many years for me to understand and come to a reckoning, if you will, with understanding what those older people had to contend with because they had been socialized in a different way than we had. They had been socialized...to go on and get along in order to accomplish some of the things that they wanted to and not to...run risk of those things being taken from them.

Dr. Hogan, the former activist spokeswoman who called J. H. White a dictator, said years later:

I mean he was not a cruel man, in that sense. I think he was a scared man. I think he was scared of the system. And I think he had an idea and a vision of what he wanted to do with that school there

in the Mississippi Delta. And he wanted it to be some kind of beautiful Mecca that students could come and they could learn. And he had all these ideas that it was going to be a beautiful campus out there and he was going to have an impact on the Mississippi Delta. And I later understood that. But I think he was scared that we were a threat to his loss of all of that.

J. H. White retired in 1971, and she said “I think it was because of the students. I really do think it was...we probably pushed him into an early retirement because they probably saw that as failed leadership on his part – that all these students would close the school and that was not our intent.” For Dr. Hogan, going to Tougaloo ended up being the best thing for her, although she has no ill feelings toward Mississippi Valley and always wishes it well.

The incident in 1970 at Mississippi Valley has always been in influence in Dr. Hogan’s life. For those involved, many of whom Hogan remains in contact with and friends, she believes “it really helped to strengthen our leadership skills, helped us to become more confident in ourselves, more thoughtful and more purposeful in a lot of the decisions that we make and how we deal with conflict and change.” She said she knows it did for her, the future college president, and considering the number of people who went on to fulfill leadership positions, she believes the same was probably true for them.

## CONCLUSION

Radicalization, nourished by a critical spirit, is always creative... radicalization criticizes and thereby liberates. Radicalization involves increased commitment to the position one has chosen, and thus ever greater engagement in the effort to transform concrete, objective reality.

Looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are so that they can more wisely build the future.

- Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

I was born an outsider of Mississippi, have always been an outsider of Mississippi Valley State University, and will always be an outsider of the black community. In my approach to this project and the conversations with the people I collaborated with to make it possible, I tried to be very aware of those basic realities surrounding the nature of *me* telling *this* particular story. Nevertheless, when I told them what my project was about and that I was interested in interviewing them, the general reaction (based purely on my perceptions of them) was some surprise at first, followed by mostly excitement that someone was interested in hearing their story and making a film about it. The shared enthusiasm in telling their story and celebrating their activism made relationship-building possible, though I had to assure some of the people I spoke with that I was not trying to paint them or Valley in any negative light. I tried to be as transparent and collaborative as possible, without losing sight my own vision or goals. With each interview and more so in the transcription process, it became clear how much I thought I knew about Mississippi history and culture, but actually didn't—particularly black history and culture in Mississippi. In that way, it demonstrates how oral histories and conversations can teach and offer more than academic discourse alone.

There is much more to the story of student activism at Mississippi Valley that deserves attention from historians, documentarians, and students (formal and non-formal). Joy Ann Williamson remarked in her book, *Radicalizing the Ebony Tower: Black Colleges and the Black Freedom Struggle in Mississippi*, “the radical

nature of black college activism is lost when it is subsumed under the umbrella of white student protest” (162). The radical activism of black students, particularly in the South, in the late 1960s and early 1970s is often thrown in the conversation with the larger anti-war movements taking place around the world and growing “counterculture” movement. Mario Savio and the Berkeley Free Speech Movement is considered the catalyst for an era of massive student protests that took place across the country, in which students directly indicted their administration. What is not mentioned in their story is the role of black organizers in Mississippi, many of them students, who taught Savio the practice of civil disobedience and radicalized his own ideology, which he then took to his large, elite university in Berkeley, California. The catalysts for the movement were the activists, workers, and students in Mississippi—erased from the narrative.

After 900 students were arrested on the campus of Mississippi Valley in February 1970, nine weeks later, there was a massacre at Jackson State. On May 15, two black students – Phillips Lafayette Gibbs, a twenty-one-year-old prelaw student, and James Earl Green, a seventeen-year-old Jim Hill High School student – were shot dead by police on Lynch St. on the campus of Jackson State College (James-Terry and Warren). The police would later assert that a sniper shot at them from a window in Alexander Hall—and that is why they unleashed twenty-eight seconds of gunfire firing over four hundred rounds of ammunition in every direction. The Jackson State Massacre left two dead and twelve injured but is widely forgotten. When it is remembered, it is still left in the shadow of the Kent State Massacre the week before.

Though far less people are aware of the killings by police at Jackson State than at Kent State, even fewer know about the massacre of in Orangeburg, South Carolina, the home of two historically black colleges—South Carolina State and Chafin State. On February 8, 1968, three hundred protestors from both colleges peacefully protested outside a local bowling alley, one of the last segregated facilities left in town, where a black Vietnam veteran had recently been denied access. A “melee with the police ensued during which police beat two female students,” and some of the justifiably enraged students broke windows of white business owners on their way back to campus (“Feb. 8, 1968: Orangeburg Massacre). The governor sent in the National Guard and local police onto their campus, where two hundred students had gathered around a bonfire. The police fired rounds of buckshot, wounding twenty-eight students, and killing three. Highway

Patrolmen murdered Henry Smith and Samuel Hammond, both South Carolina State students, and Delano Middleton, a local high school student (“Feb. 8, 1968...”). And yet, so few people know about this event, one of the deadliest attacks on students by police in American history.

The work done by black student activists in the South in the Black Power Movement is not a part of public memory, as have the crimes against them by the white supremacist power structure. Though the progressive movements on black campuses were notably different than those at Berkeley, Columbia, Harvard, or even the University of Mississippi, they were no less radical. The activism that took place on black college campuses in the South merit their own analysis, and those involved deserve to have their stories put on the record and listened to. The story of the largest mass arrest on a campus in U. S. history at Mississippi Valley in 1970 requires more attention and without delay. The people who experienced it for themselves and can give their first-person accounts are now over seventy years old, and the time we still have to collect and document these vital stories decreases by the second. The transcripts of the oral histories collected in this project, as well as the short documentary that accompanies this thesis, will ultimately be digitized and published online. There is a significant amount of work to be done if the stories and sacrifices of radical students in Mississippi’s history are to be remembered. By bringing this story into people’s consciousness and remembering the sacrifices of these students, the hope is to see how harm has been caused in the past, and how we can work to mitigate harm moving forward.



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APPENDIX



## APPENDIX A

“THE STUDENT GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION DEMANDS THE FOLLOWING:

1. Revision of the “Deduction, Refunds and Withdrawal” rule.
2. Clarification and publication of “Student Insurance.”
3. Separation of room and board.
4. An optional Meal Book System.
5. Removal of “Harassment Clauses” from the Student Handbook.
6. Dismissal of specified nights to visit dormitories.
7. Female students be permitted to operate and retain possession of automobiles.
8. Control of the Student Activity Fund.
9. Immediate distribution of Academic Scholarships.
10. The total monetary amount received as Activity Fees. The amount used to current date.
11. Clarification of fictitious Laboratory Fees.
12. Reformation of Disciplinary Committees.
13. Extension of Sophomore curfew hours to Freshman Women at the beginning of Second Semester.
14. More public telephones.
15. Renovation of showers and shower curtains in the dormitories.
16. Written rules governing the conduct of Security Officers.
17. A pro-rated tuition system
18. Dismissal of the option dress rule.
19. A full time physician.
20. Open washeteria facilities.
21. Additional janitorial and maid personnel.
22. Renovation of the Old Cafeteria.
23. A Dean of Students.
24. A right to choose the names of buildings.
25. A more adequate laundry.
26. Instructors be required to post grades at the end of the semester.
27. Retirement age instructors be removed immediately.
28. Removal of instructors with mental incapacitation.
29. Recruitment of well qualified full time instructors.
30. Intense screening of potential faculty members by chosen student representatives.”

(Exhibit One, “Construction of Events Leading to Closing...”)

## APPENDIX B

“FROM: The Student Government Association

TO: The Student Body

DATE: January 28, 1970

“Brothers & Sisters: On Friday, January 9, 1970, the members of the Student Government Association presented a list of thirty (30) demands to be met by the Administrative Council.

“The President of the [SGA], Mr. Tyone Gettis, made it clear that he knew all of the Demand[s] could not be met at the present time but some could be met at the present meeting.

“After explaining Demand in detail, the Chairman, Vice President Lowe, told the council members that they may be excused. This was done without any deliberation, meditation or negotiation. This developed into an undesirable and unfeasible atmosphere for negotiation.

“After the [SGA] President conversed with the President of the Institution, the Council quickly reassembled. The demands were understood and accepted by the Administrative Council. However, several Demands in question would be referred to committees. These committees made their recommendations to the Administrative Council. (Note): Dean Howard was acting as chairman of the Council. After approving all the recommendations from the committee, the members were to assemble about 5:30 P.M., January 10, 1970 to review typing and wording of the agreements.

“After returning to the meeting we were confronted with the President of the College and three other Council members and the Vice-President clearly and without reservation denied that any of the Demands had been met.

“The Vice President of the [SGA] made it avidly clear that he, President Gettis, nor any of the Board members would argue over the validity of the Demands. He also stated that the Demands had to be complied with by 6:30 p.m. February 4, 1970.

“To date the Administration has made no effort to seek advice and suggestions from the [SGA] on the validity and legality of the Demands.

“On January 28, 1970 the Administration willfully and purposefully constructed and printed fictitious information that was highly inaccurate and untrue.

“It seems that the [SGA] is of the impression that the Administration is trying to create animosity and diversity between the students and faculty members toward the [SGA].

“Let it be known that the [SGA] and Student Governing Board seek sensible and intelligent answers. However, this propaganda will not in any way alter, obstruct, or stop our struggle for human recognition and respect as being part of this Institution.

“Brothers and Sisters, the deadline is February 4, 1970 and the SGA at that time of this publication, still seek positive & constructive answers to our demands., The destiny of MVSC, your academic, social, and psychological future is at stake if the Administration fails to respond in an intelligent, respectful, constructive and positive way, then, Brothers and Sisters it is imperative that the SGA take all necessary and legal steps to acquire our Demands.”

(“Construction of Events...,” Exhibit Five).

## APPENDIX C

### MRS. FANNIE LOU HAMER'S SPEECH

“Delivered at Mississippi Valley State College  
Itta Bena, Mississippi 38941  
February, 1970

“Thank you very kindly President. Good evening beautiful young black men and women. “I’m very tired, but very happy to see you this afternoon...”

“I can’t understand tonight for the life of me that a black man, at least a colored man, that a president of an institution that supposed to give young people the kind of academic freedom that we have always been denied of, will not do nothing that the students want. You know, this is very puzzling to me, you know, I know the cat is mixed up in a lot of his ways. But most of the time people, finally, you know, I’ve seen some of the world’s greatest Toms in service, but this man must be a Nuclear ‘Tom.’ You know, this man don’t even listen to nothing, reasoning or anything else” (“Fannie Lou Hamer’s Speech – Page One”)

She then continued to describe a conversation she had in Raleigh, North Carolina where she was working doing Black Contemporary Studies, with a professor that previously worked at Mississippi Valley College. She asked him if he was there when White was at the college, to which he responded, “Uh huh, that’s the reason I’m away from here now... Honey, that man pull more strings, that man got more money from the white power structure to do what he wanted done and I could have made a lot of money myself, but it does something to me and I know that I couldn’t have slept, I couldn’t have gone to sleep at night knowing what I was doing to my people” (“Fannie Lou Hamer’s Speech – Page Two”).

“I would like to say this because I really feel like this, President White, when, President White, everything is over and done, you’re coming in to your last line of the race, the white people won’t want you and we won’t want you. You have a chance now to redeem yourself by doing something that these young students want to get... See, what I am trying to say to you tonight, President White, that these white folks are just fooling you, because when you get behind they back, you’re just another nigger just like the rest of us, no more and no less...” (Fannie Lou Hamer’s Speech, 2-3).

“I want the young people to know something in this place. He can talk about expelling all of you from school, but if he would, you know he would be scared as hell tonight if he figured all of you was going to walk out of here because he knows damn well he wouldn’t have a job... Now I want you to know something that if your education is no better than making you do the things that you know are wrong, you are no better than President White. You see, I’m getting sick and tired, and sick and tired, and sick and tired of every place I go of white folks picking out our leaders. You can rest assure young people regardless of who you are, you can be black, white, green, brown, or gold colored, if the man picks them out for you, you ain’t got nothing. Now that’s what happening in these institutions, the state controlled. You know every building here is named after Mr. Somebody, Mr. So and So, Mr. Such and Such of Thing, but know I think this is ridiculous, you know I just feel like if I was a man tonight I don’t know whether I could go to bed and knowing that I had done some of the things that were done here last year, some of the things that were done not only denied the young people their freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of participation and the thing that was sickening to me, I hope this is not the truth, when I heard that he said or some people said at Mississippi Vocational College, that the young men could entertain the young women on Wednesday night and Sunday night in the lobby...” (3-4).

“What I’m saying to you President White tonight, you are dealing with beautiful young black men and women that’s determined to get a decent education, but you don’t have to draw the line for them to sit in a lobby to talk. This, this is too much, this is taking away” (5).

“I’m one woman that will say I’m not free, but I’m proud, I’m black and I am fifty-two. But I just want you to know young people that you will have to demand because nobody, whether it’s a little or much, nobody is going to give you anything on a silver platter. You’ll have to fight and demand for your freedom” (6).

“We know that you are not going to do everything that the young people is demanding, but you must go to some distance because if you don’t President White, you see all these young people out here tonight, but in the near future, and that time is coming soon – you won’t have any student body and its nobody, but nobody’s going to keep you, going to pay you to teach an empty college. So shape up, I’m talking to you because you’re probably back there” (6-7)

“One other thing I would like to say, President White, if I was teaching at any institution, or if I was president of any institution and this many young people was against me, they wouldn’t have to fire me, I would leave. Because any man in his right mind, anybody, you know, he might have been to Whitefield a couple of times, but if he’s in his right mind, he should know by the reactions of his young people here at this institution that he’s not wanted and that I lost all the faith, I lost all the faith, President White, in you when I saw you posing in a Yearbook with Ross Barnett. I’m just giving you advice which you probably don’t want, but I want you to know something, after the white power structure has used you over and over again and when you get where you can’t deliver, they are finished with you” (7).

“I want to be honest with you, if we have to organize and not bring hundreds, but thousands of people here in the support of these young people. They’re much more important to me at this time than you could ever be because President, your days is gone. Gee, I know people don’t like me for my plain way of speaking, for my honesty. But it really hurt and it hurts me very much when I see my young people, young black men and young black women that’s not only being exploited by the white power structure but being exploited by their own people” (7-8).

“You know this is not funny, you know we’re taking about equal education for our children, but yet you’re trying to hold on to the man and this same man is setting up schools, private schools, to give their kids a different education to what our kids is getting, but at the same time when one of these young men out here in the audience get 18 and 21 years old, they’ll pick him up and carry him to Vietnam to die for what we don’t have. And its quite a few of the people from the state of Mississippi that’s given their lives, not for themselves, but for niggers like you and its time for you to stop playing politics with the power structure. Because this time is coming and its coming fast, President White, when they won’t want you, and we’re not going to want you either” (8-9)

“As I close, I don’t know at this point how much further I will go. But I am traveling, I’m in the air almost half of my time and I am going from college campus to college campus throughout the US. I’m not only speaking to the black students, but I am speaking to the white students too, but I want to tell you something and all of you that’s doing it. I don’t like a traitor. I don’t like no man that will betray his own race. I don’t like no man that will sit in a closed session and call for patrolmen and police guards to make out, for you to make out like that you are having to protect yourself from militants. Young people here is trying to get education, not harm you, but making demands that’s really healthy for a college is it is to be progressive” (9)

“But I want to tell you the same closing story because its still relevant to what happened here last year. There was an old man that was very wise - and we don’t have many of them today - this was a very wise old man. And he could answer different questions and finally some young people said, ‘We are really going to

trick him tonight, so we are going to this old man and we are going to carry a live bird and we're going to ask this old man if it is alive or it is dead. If he says dead, we are going to let it fly out of our hands. But if he says it is alive, we are going to crush it.' So these young people walked up to this old man and they said, 'This we hold in our hands today, is it alive or is it dead?' He looked at the young people and he smiled and he said, 'It's in your hands.' 'THANK YOU'" (12).

## APPENDIX D

### SPEECH BY TYRONE GETTIS

“You see, until we get some type of compliance, some type of negotiation, or the answer to our demands there ain’t going to be no class. For those of you who are in seminar or any other nar or those who choose to attend classes, well we have to do what the spirit says do – you know I was always told that if the spirit says pray, pray. If the spirit says love, love. I hope the spirit doesn’t waste too much time saying pray and love. You see, we have something to fight for. Anything that we are demanding is valid and everything that we are demanding has been agreed upon by everyone except J. H. White. Now, one man ain’t going to stop me and I am sure he can’t stop 2500 of us...” (1).

“For those of you who attempt to break the boycott, we don’t intend to try and stand there physically and block your path if you choose to go, but all I’m saying is, remember what happened to the people last year who defied the student body. You don’t want that to happen again do you? You see, I’m not here to threaten anybody, I’m not here to threaten any of you. Your safety is at heart, but for those of you who choose to break the boycott, the SGA photographer will be there to take your picture to have something to remember you by” (2).

“There have been various rumors as to who’s in the area and who’s on alert, so taking all of this into consideration, we had to journey into the community to see just who White had called. Now, we went by the Mississippi State Highway Patrol Office in Greenwood and we counted eight cars, eight ain’t enough. We went by the National Guard Armory and we could not come to a conclusion as to whether the National Guard is on alert or not. But we feel that our fight is not the highway patrol nor of the National Guard, our enemy lives in ‘Friendship Manor.’

For those of you who are afraid of the affiliation with the Athletic Program as far as scholarships are concerned, for those of you who are concerned about your status with your financial aid distributor – I would like for you to convey a message to that that I conveyed to White, if necessary we will show him that old Sherman will march on them too. You see this is White’s way of controlling or disunifying by threatening your financial aid and by having instructors that are simply immune and the person in seminar is sympathetic to White’s will – and you see they tend to try to discourage you y telling you not to participate, but I must inform you that if we lose this one, your SGA, your fight for demands, your fight for freedom is over the hill. If White loses, he’s over the hill” (2-3).

“Now the SGA has really been faithfully working I think, and leans toward men. Now we are few – you are many and when I say that – you elected us as officers. Now, as long as we have your support and your participation, we can remove obstacles. So hear this in mind, this is the test, the President has vowed that he will not be defeated, and I have vowed that he is a liar. You see that I would like to instill in you once again that we advocated non-violence, but this is an education institution and the purpose here is to teach and to learn. We ain’t going to learn so they can’t teach, they can’t fail you for learning what they didn’t teach – I like for you to bear that in mind. Now I would like to encourage you that during the boycott to keep abreast of your studies and don’t become lax because we know that we are here for academic studies, but we have a little problem that we have to take care of. We got a house nigger somewhere around. Now we have suspicious persons under suspicion, suspected cheese eaters – Now what the cheese eaters don’t know is that we know them. You see some of the people they confided in are paid by is. You see, you see, we got people that are sympathetic to our way of thinking also” (3)

“Their ranks are infiltrated at a high degree, I can assure you of that... I’d like for you also to go into the deal with an open heart and our welfare and the valor of accomplishments at heart. You see we’re fighting for a reason and not the season, so we can make it an annual event if he wants it that way. You see we have really showed him when we last turned our here last night to hear one of the nation’s most in demand speakers, Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer, and if you think she spoke in the auditorium, you should have heard her on the way down here and on the way back. She is a very dynamic person and she has a lot of faith in young people and she also reminded me before I left her home last night, that I should remind White that she’ll send not hundred, but thousands” (4)

“You see I’ll like for you to know that the Associated Press in Jackson knows of you fight, the Delta Democrat Times in Greenville knows of your fight. The person from the Associated Press, Mr. McGandy [Morganti] was the person who came to our aid last year when White sent Jane Biggers to print the misleading article about the Love-In and of course, Mr. McGandy [Morganti] took care of this in his own way. I talked to him personally and he agreed that everything would be done to the best of reporting standards in our favor” (4)

“I have one observation – the security officers have new night sticks. The security officers have new shiny black night sticks. I would like to reassure myself that they don’t intend to use them on anybody black. They have to be made for White because I feel like this, I want one of them to raise one at me. Now in order to get on with tonight’s activities we would like for you to remain orderly and remain non-violent and wait until the activities officially begin so we can inform you as to what’s happening tomorrow” (5)

Today is “D” Day, tomorrow is “E” day and we’ll go on down to ‘Z’ day and when we get to ‘Z’ day..... (laugh).....” (5).

## APPENDIX E

“I wish first to direct attention to the regulations governing class attendance. Briefly, these regulations provide that regular class attendance is required of all students, and any student who misses three consecutive classes is reported to the Office of the Dean of Instruction. Thereafter, a permit to re-enter class must be secured from the Dean of Instruction’s Office.”

“A copy of the pertinent regulations is attached as a supplement to this letter. In directing attention to the school regulations, I do so because of the great concern and distress which the events of the last few days have caused me. **NONETHELESS, I WANT TO GIVE ASSURANCES TO ALL STUDENTS THAT THEY WILL BE AFFORDED PROTECTION IF THEY WISH TO ATTEND CLASSES.** Adequate security personnel will be provided to guarantee the safety of students who elect to resume class attendance on Monday, Feb. 9, 1970, and thereafter until normal condition are restored.

“Our faculty, administrative personnel and I, as your President, are here for one primary purpose and that is to see that you as a student get the best education it is possible for a college to give. **ANYONE WHO SAYS OTHERWISE IS LEADING YOU DOWN A BLIND ALLEY.** “CLASSES WILL BE RESUMED MONDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 1970. The choice of attendance and continuing your higher education is up to you. **WE HOPE YOU CHOOSE WISELY.**”

Sincerely, J. H. White”

(“Construction of Events...,” 2, original underlining, original capitalization).



## APPENDIX F

### **“Boycott continues at Valley State amid heavy contingent of police” by Dial Parrott (DDT Staff Writer) [Tuesday, February 10, 1970 – *Delta Democrat-Times*]**

“TTTA BENA – Mississippi Valley State College President O. P. Lowe said today that a total student boycott of classes at the all-black institution was still in effect.

George Metz, with the State Law Enforcement Assistance Division which is directing security forces on campus, reported no clashes between police and students during the night.

“The calm night followed a massive student rally in the college gymnasium Monday afternoon in support of the boycott.

“There the students that that Student Body President Tyrone Gettis of Hattiesburg had been arrested during the morning by an estimated 30 helmeted security force. (The Leflore County Sheriff’s Department reported this morning that Gettis and Magee are still being held in the county jail on \$500 bond, charged with interfering with access to a campus building.)

“They discovered that two faculty members who had been advising the Student Government Association which is direction the boycott had been dismissed Monday for alleged ‘classroom inefficiency.’ If he had wanted to, the man who made these announcements, Harold Dean, could also have announced that he was awaiting a sheriff’s warrant to take him away too.

“But Dean did not. Instead the acting classroom boycott leader told the press there not to tell the students all they knew. He said he was worried someone might get mad as it was and do something rash.

“When the students began to boo at his request that they go along with an 8 p.m. to 7 a.m. curfew just announced by the college president, Dean warned, ‘The only way we can win this is to prove that we are intelligent people. President White just wants us to become violent. He knows that if we just do that, he can win it’

“Dean did not know how true the last remark was.

“At the request of college President J. H. White and the state college board, MVSC has been transformed into an armed camp.

“Within are the 1500 resident students locked into their dorms nightly at gunpoint. Outside holding those weapons are a variety of forces. Sixty hand-picked black policemen from across the state stand ready in a dorm they have converted into their headquarters to meet any disturbance.

“They carry their various preferences of pistol. Some wear shotgun shell bandilearos. Others prepare has masks for use. The chief of this special force, Lt. Willie Carson of the Greenville Police Department, said he did not expect his men would have to shoot any students.

“‘At least not unless it is necessary,’ Carson said. ‘We are here under cover of the law.’

“Across the campus two men all in front of President White’s office holding rifles across their laps. When someone approaches down the 40-foot hallway leading to it, they rise and motion him into the vice president’s office to the right. They point their rifles at visiting newsmen. Students say they have been threatened too.

“President White said that the two guards’ were a necessary precaution since the students might try to rush his office. He said the guards would not use their rifles if students attempted this. He could not say what they would do with the rifles, but confirmed the guards were former maintenance men on special duty.

“He said that some of these janitorial personnel had been to the Mississippi Police Training Academy near Jackson for special instruction in student demonstration control.

“Around the gates of the college, White has stationed his nine-man campus security force with combat helmet liners and pump shotguns. They search any suspicious student car entering the college.

“The reasons the armed forces are occupying the campus is a student boycott of classes which begun Thursday. Monday the entire student body stayed out to support the 30 student demands. These include requests for a full-time physician, ten academic scholarships and the renaming of campus buildings named after White Mississippi politicians whom the students view as committed segregationists.

“The students claim that one set of negotiated demands which were agreed upon by students and faculty were turned over to college vice-president O. P. Lowe, Jan. 9. The students say this is the last they saw of their document. Lowe and White maintain no such document ever existed. White said he knew of no joint faculty-student negotiations.

“White discussed these demands with visiting newsmen. He said he had agreed to one of them, the request for academic scholarships, a year ago when students also boycotted classes. White said the scholarships to remain unused was not his. He said he had referred the matter to committee, but it had not reported to him in a year. At present there are scholarships for football, basketball, track, band and choir, according to White.

“The leaders of the boycott, who are also the elected student body representatives, stressed the importance of student recommendations in hiring faculty.

“Some of these teachers come in here and talk about a dog they saw wandering to class. White won't hire anyone he thinks is better than he is. He's scared of them' a student remarked.

“N. S. D. Thompson, an economics teacher, and Richard Tucker, a social science teacher, were dismissed from the faculty Monday by White. Tucker had been an elected advisor to the student government, and both men were reportedly sympathetic to student demands.

“White said the dismissals had nothing to do with their support for the students. White maintained that 'classroom inefficiency' alone was the cause.

“White issued an 'emergency proclamation' at 4 p.m. Monday. It said that any student not in his dorm between 8 p.m. and 7 a.m. 'would be subjected to legal and disciplinary action.' White would not elaborate on what legal action was envisioned.

“Students who gathered in the gymnasium at 5 p.m. seemed generally willing to agree to student government requests that they obey the curfew. Dean, the ranking student leader not in jail, told them there would possibly be a march on Tuesday.”

## APPENDIX G

### **“Campus Roars Heard” by Ken Fairly, Staff Writer [Sunday, February 16, 1969 – *Clarion-Ledger*]**

“The turmoil which has struck campuses across the nation has inevitably arrived in Mississippi.

“For the moment, at least, we are concerned with Mississippi Valley State College at Itta Bena.

“Tomorrow, or next week, or in April, it could be any other college or university in Mississippi, supported and maintained by the taxpayers of Mississippi, black and white.

“At the Itta Bena institution, students and some faculty have rebelled, as they have at the University of California, San Francisco State, the University of Chicago, Columbia and elsewhere, demanding a voice in the administration and policy-making apparatus of the school.

“Specifically, they have presented a list of at least two dozen DEMANDS which must be complied with, or they won’t play ball; they’ll not attend classes, they’ll break out windows, and otherwise disrupt the learning process of others.

“One demand reportedly not acceded to, according to reports from the campus, was one which would force the administration to allow all black organizations on campus, including NAACP, CORE, SNCC, and the Black Panthers.

“The administration referred to, when eventually projected to the highest authority, would mean the Board of Trustees of the IHL and/or the Governor of the state.

“Now, let us examine what the annual report for the fiscal year 1968 from the office of John Edgar Hoover, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and what it has to say about SNCC and the Black Panthers.

‘Intelligence data indicated a growing militancy on the part of black extremists. Emboldened Negro agitators and revolutionaries such as Stokely Carmichael are coming to the forefront in Negro communities. Their appeal to destructive action and GUERRILLA warfare has intensified a mood of lawlessness among sympathetic followers, thereby increasing the potential for violence.

‘Certain organizations claiming to be civil rights groups but which in fact preach hatred for the white race, DEMAND immunity from laws, and advocate violence, constitute a serious threat to our country’s internal security.

‘Among such groups is the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) headed by Stokely Carmichael and later by H. Rap Brown—

‘Another such organization is the Black Panther Party, which was founded as the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense at Oakland, Calif., in December 1966, for the alleged purpose of combating police brutality and uniting militant black youth.

‘The political philosophy of its leaders is based on the writings of Mao Tse-tung and black revolutionary writers. They advocate the use of guns and guerilla tactics to end their alleged oppression.

‘The report concludes this section and strife and rioting with this comment: ‘the question of foreign influences in the black nationalist movement is a matter of grave concern, and information has been developed showing foreign involvement in varying degrees.’

‘It is evident to investigators at various governmental levels that the Black Panther Party, in particular, advocates the overthrow of the United States by force and arms.

‘There is no reason why the State of Mississippi – whether the Board of Trustees of the Institution of Higher Learning, the Governor, the administration currently in office at MVSC, should tolerate such an organization on the campus there or elsewhere in the boundaries of Mississippi.

‘Either the State has the power, the authority to regulate its colleges and campuses, or it does not.

“Now is the time to find out.

“Clear out the protestors at Itta Bena and let them go elsewhere to create turmoil, or permit them to attend school under the rules and regulations set down by the governing body.

“To do otherwise is pure folly.”

## APPENDIX H

### **“Writ expected to be asked to free 889 MVSC students” by DIAL PARROTT (DDT Staff Writer) [Wednesday, February 11, 1970 -*The Delta Democrat-Times*]**

“TTTA BENA – An attorney for some 889 Mississippi Valley State College students jailed after a mass arrest on the campus Tuesday afternoon was expected to seek a habeas corpus order today to free the students.

“North Mississippi Rural Legal Services attorney Alix Sanders of Greenwood left for Belzoni this morning to seek the court action from Circuit Court Judge Arthur Clark Jr.

“The arrests came at 4:30 p.m. Tuesday after the students had gathered approximately 200 yards from the main gate in a face-to-face confrontation with a special, all-black police task force of 60 officers assembled from around the state.

“The two groups met after the students marched along a campus road on the north side of the grounds before running head-on into the 60 helmeted and armed officers. Both groups stood at an apparent standstill for about 30 minutes.

“Newsmen, who were kept off campus and harassed continually by campus, county, and state police, watched from about 200 yards away but could not hear the interchange between the two parties.

“At approximately 4:30 p.m., 10 college buses were pulled up to the scene from the rear of the campus. Suddenly, 20 to 30 students in the front ranks of the group threw their hands up. Reporters were unable to tell whether the police drew guns. There had been no shouting, singing or loud exchanges between the marchers and police up to that point.

“The police herded the students into the buses. The students did not resist. At about 4:45 p.m., an estimated 25 car highway patrol armada arrived outside the main gate. The patrol cars then escorted the buses to the Leflore County Penal Farm where the first load of students was imprisoned.

“Not all of the students could be loaded onto the first contingent of buses. Some waited as long as three hours in the windy, 40-degree weather to be taken aboard.

“United Press International quoted George Metz, coordinator of the force on campus, as saying 889 students were arrested. Of those, 886 were taken to the Mississippi State Prison at Parchman and three, who were juveniles, were taken to the Leflore County Penal Farm, UPI said.

“Rims Barner, with Delta Ministry in Greenville, said he had heard the collective bond set on all the students was \$178,000.

“Tuesday’s showdown and mass arrest followed a week of steadily building tension at the all-black college following the submission of a 30-point list of demands by student government leaders last Wednesday.

“MVSC President J. H. White responded to a student boycott of classes which began Thursday by beefing up his college’s security force, then calling for additional help in the form of the 60-man special task force. On Monday morning, student body president Tyrone Gettis of Utica and vice president Elijah Magee of Hattiesburg were arrested on charges of interfering with access to a campus building.

“White dismissed N. S. D. Thompson, an economics teacher, and Richard Tucker, a social science instructor, from the college faculty Monday. Both men were reportedly sympathetic to student demands, although White denied this had anything to do with their discharge.

“By Tuesday morning, the student boycott of classes was virtually total. At noon Tuesday, White issued an ultimatum to all students, demanding they attend classes that afternoon and today or see the school closed at 11 a.m. today. No students attended class Tuesday afternoon. Hundreds reportedly marched to the registrar’s office shortly after the ultimatum, to obtain withdrawal slips.

“Throughout the day of the arrests, White was in conference in the school administration building with state officials. Armed security guards stood guard there.

“White said Tuesday that all scholarships would be revoked if the school were shut down on Wednesday. His ultimatum said ‘a selective admission policy will be established’ for the second semester, which White state would begin Feb. 23.

“White said adequate protection would be afforded those wishing to attend classes. On Tuesday, there were no who so wished. He banned all ‘further meetings and demonstrations of any kind.’

“White said Tuesday night that buses would run on schedule today. He said classroom attendance today would determine ‘whether or not to keep the school open.’

“The two student leaders held in the Leflore County jail since Monday vowed Tuesday to continue to boycott despite the mass arrests. Gettis and Magee, were released Tuesday on \$500 bond.

‘We intend to boycott and march until our demands are met,’ Magee said. ‘We will not allow such uncalled for acts to mar our movement for academic freedom. Everybody is going to find MVSC President J. H. White out.’

“Security police at the main gate began turning newsmen away shortly before the students marched out of a building on the north side of the campus Tuesday afternoon. ‘Get your... off Mississippi Valley State property,’ a security guard told a Delta Democrat-Times reporter-photographer team when it protested the order.

“When the newsmen moved across U. S. 82 directly in front of the campus, they were repeatedly harassed during the course of the march, arrests and jailings. Just before the arrests, a Leflore County deputy sheriff approached the two Democrat-Times newsmen and ordered them to ‘get out of here and I mean right now.’ He accused them of stopping highway traffic, but the reporters stayed where they were.

“When the highway patrol arrived, several officers jerked their thumbs in the direction of Greenwood as they passed the reporters. One car stopped and an officer told the two they were on a state right-of-way and to clear out. As the reporters began to walk toward their car 100 yards ahead, another patrol car pulled alongside.

“An officer opened his door, got out and told the reporters to ‘move it. Get out of here now!’ The reports kept walking toward to their car the patrol car pulled off the road on the right shoulder a few feet behind them.

“The patrol car followed the reporters a few feet to their rear, all the way to the newsmen’s car. One of the officers swung a billy club out of the window as the car crept along behind.

“A student at Mississippi Valley State College told the Delta Democrat-Times this morning no classes were being held at the college. Bessie Conner, in the Junior Women’s Dormitory, said she hadn’t been out of the building and didn’t know if police were still on campus.

“A campus official declined to say what action President White planned today. He said he expected White to make a statement after 11 a.m. Other college officials, including White, were not available for comment.”

## APPENDIX I

### **“US judge refuses to order reopening of Valley State” by DIAL PARROTT and BOB BOYD (DDT Staff Writers) [Thursday, February 12, 1970 – *The Delta Democrat-Times*]**

“US District Court Judge William C. Keady today denied a request that Mississippi Valley State College, closed Wednesday following the mass arrest of 894 students, be reopened.

“But he ordered a hearing for Tuesday to determine whether the college can summarily dismiss students for participating in class boycotts and adopt a new ‘selective admissions’ policy announced Tuesday by MVSC President J. H. White.

“White had said the school would reopen on Feb. 16 and classes would resume Feb. 23. Also Wednesday, he revoked all scholarships. Also Wednesday, he revoked all scholarships. All but three of the students arrested Tuesday were taken on school buses to the state penitentiary at Parchman, where they spent Tuesday night. All had been released by Thursday morning.

“They face preliminary hearings Monday morning in Leflore County Court in Greenwood. All were charged with blocking a public road and disobeying campus security officers. The officers had ordered them to disperse their march, a peaceful protest on campus in support of a list of demands the Student Government Association had earlier presented to White.

“Approximately 500 of the 894 students released from Parchman on Wednesday returned to the closed campus today to pick up personal belongings, a student boycott leader reported.

“The students were allowed by Circuit Court Judge Arthur B. Clark to return to the campus, but they were warned to leave immediately after collecting their effects. Sgt. Chester Clark, of the special state security force at the campus, said Thursday morning that student cars were being searched as they arrived at the main school gate.

“The arrival and departure of students was proceeding without incident, Clark said.

“The students were being transported to the campus by students with cars and by members of the Greenwood black community, Magee said.

“The students were transported to the St. Francis of Assisi Center in Greenwood on buses which the center provided to the Sheriff’s Department. White refused to allow the use of MVSC buses. Ten College buses were used to carry the students to Parchman. The first load of girls began arriving in Greenwood at 10 p.m.

“‘We will approach whatever we do from a legal, non-violent angle, but unless we all go back to MVSC, none of us go back,’ SGA president Tyrone Gettis said. He was referring to White’s announcement that a ‘selective admissions policy’ will be used on Feb. 19 when students are to reregister for the second term.

“It was widely anticipated among the students that none of the elected Student Government Association leaders, all of whom helped to direct the boycott, will be readmitted.

“At the St. Francis of Assisi Center in Greenwood, Tyrone Gettis and Elijah Magee, the two student body leaders released Tuesday from the Leflore County Jail, vowed to continue their efforts. ‘Right now we can’t say what steps we will take,’ Magee said.

“The scene at the center was relaxed and gay. Students were taken off buses from Parchman and escorted into the cafeteria for a hot meal from a team of cooks organized by the center. They then passed through a line before a table, at which Sheriff’s officials accepted their bonds. According to an order by Circuit Court Judge Arthur B. Clark, bond could range from \$25 to a simple recognizance for a student without funds.

“Approximately 150 parents gathered in the center auditorium, awaiting the releases, Gentle Rouser, an English teacher at Riverside High School in Avon, said he thought White had been very unprofessional in his conduct as an administrator. Rouser and his wife, Barbara, were waiting for their son, Joseph Webb, 18.

“I almost think he’s better off at Parchman than at MVSC,’ Rouser said in relating the difficulty he said he had in getting information about his son from college officials after the arrests. ‘We couldn’t get on campus Tuesday to find out where he was, and no one from the college would tell us,’ Rouser said.

“At Parchman Wednesday night, the 894 students were in good spirits but eager to leave Greenwood and freedom. [Parchman] Superintendent Tom D. Cook praised the students’ conduct. ‘Under the circumstances, they have been remarkably well-behaved and disciplined,’ he said.

“Cook and other prison farm officials had gone without sleep for almost two days in making preparations to house the sudden influx of students. Cook said the farm had done its best to handle the students, who totaled 50 percent of the normal Parchman population.

“I am never happy about seeing college children sent here,’ Cook said.

“Approximately half of the 440 coeds sent to Parchman were housed in the east wing of the maximum-security unit. They were sleepy but cheerful as they talked through the bars with reporters. Some had slept in the cells, and some had laid out bedding in the hallway when the cells were full.

“The coeds said they had eaten a breakfast of bacon and eggs that morning and found Parchman treatment a surprise from what they had expected. The girls cheered when reporters told them buses were on the way to take them back for bonding and release.

“Beverly Wade, a SGA officer from Crystal Springs, said she thought the arrests and imprisonment had made the students that much stronger in their struggle. ‘Our demands are just. We know our cause is right,’ she said.

“White feels it is his institution, not the students. He will try to keep out those who are not going along with his dictatorship,’ she said.

“All of the 454 male students were housed at the First Offenders Camp, the newest inmate dorm at Parchman. Asst. Supt. Jack Byars arranged for four student leaders to talk to the press in the dorm.

“Harold Dean, the ranking student leader at the march at the campus Tuesday, told of the arrests. He said they were stopped by security police during the march. They refused to disperse but told police they would remain non-violent, he said. They were then loaded on buses.

“Dean said the jailings had hardened the students but that they intended to keep their protest non-violent. ‘If necessary we will go back and march,’ Dean said.

“Several of the men in jail were Vietnam veterans. ‘I just got out of Vietnam two months ago fighting for these people and now they throw me in jail,’ one vet said.

“Roosevelt Yarbrough, a SGA officer from Pattison, was in the Marine Corps in Vietnam. ‘White doesn’t seem to appreciate we was over there fighting for his snake-infested cotton field,’ Yarbrough said. The expression ‘snake-infested cottonfield,’ is one of President White’s favorite descriptions of the college site when he first went there in 1950.

“Many of the student expressed amazement at the coolness shown by Calvin McDowell, a junior from North Carolina. Dean said McDowell just walked through police lines at the Leflore County Penal Farm, where the students were taken initially. Dean said McDowell checked on the coeds, assured them they would not be harmed, and went out to get water for the rest of the students.

“I didn’t consider myself a criminal, and I just went where I wanted to,’ McDowell said. He said he was not bothered by police except once. He said he was kicked by a highway patrolman when he attempted to board a bus bound for Parchman with a load of coeds. ‘I wanted to tell them not to be afraid, but the cop just gave me his boot,’ McDowell said.



“At the St. Francis Center, Gettis and Magee described their arrests Monday and imprisonment in the Leflore County jail until Tuesday. They said they were served warrants by security police at about 9 p.m. Monday. They asked for a chance to confer with their lawyer before being taken away, they said.

“After some discussion with police, they were pulled away from the confrontation by other students, Magee said. Gettis said they were in the student union building, calling the attorney, five minutes later when 30 armed and helmeted police marched down the hallway and took them into custody.”

## APPENDIX J

### **“Inside ‘Alcatraz’” (Letter to the Editor) by Frances Whippel – [Thursday, February 19, 1970 – *The Delta Democrat-Times*]**

“To the editor:

“There are probably a lot of people wondering what Alcatraz is really like to the insiders. Speaking from experience I can truthfully say I am not anxious to go back but before I will be defeated by White I will.

“Around 11 p.m. we arrived at Parchman where we were taken to maximum security. We were asked to empty our pockets and sign our names. Before we entered into the cell block we were searched again by a trusty. The cell block consisted of 20 cells with two bunks in each, two solitary cells and two showers which were out of order. There were also mattresses placed around the cell block on the floor. Most of the girls preferred to sleep on the floor. Around 12 midnight, we were told that White had sent food that had been prepared for us on campus for dinner but unfortunately White couldn’t eat it himself so he decided he would send it to us. It consisted of cold dressing, roast beef, English peas, two cookies, Kool-aid, milk and an apple and an orange.

“Around 2 a.m., 260 girls had been placed in maximum security. After every one had eaten we tried to settle down for some sleep but found this was almost impossible if half your body was on the mattress and the other half on the floor where the heat was coming from.

“11 a.m. we were served cold toast without butter, eggs and bacon and nothing to drink.

“I was later told that we were fortunate because some of the students only got cold toast and eggs. The girls who didn’t get breakfast only got an orange.

“Around 2 p.m. we were let out the rear door of the building so we could get sunshine and fresh air which was very much needed. The area we were placed into on the side was surrounded by a fence with barbed wire around the top.

“At 6 p.m. we were served supper which was home-made peaches and old-fashioned corn bread. I guess you could say that supper was what is known as soul food.

“At 9 p.m. we were paid a visit by State Rep. Clark, who brought us cigarettes and matches along with the food news that we would be out of there by 10:30.

“We waited impatiently and talked about how good it would be to take a bath, get a good drink of water and be surrounded by heat rather than sit on it.

“Around 11 p.m. the cell door was opened and we loaded on buses which was driven by a father. He told us he was glad to have us and we told him we were glad to be there, which was doggone right.

“We were taken to St. Francis Catholic Center in Greenwood where we were told to sign in, eat and then we could see our parents or call them.

“The students whose parents were not there and who didn’t have transportation were placed in homes provided by the people in the city.

“The one thing that disturbs me is the fact that we were arrested, fingerprinted and pictures taken and taken to Parchman and no one knew why. When our parents tried to locate us, no one knew where we were. 889 students missing and no one knows where they are? Sounds more like a kidnapping than an arrest.

“What kind of man did this to us? A man with a warped mind, twisted soul and evil thoughts. What other kind of man would be concerned with the appearance of the campus rather than giving the students an education. What kind of supposed to be black man can do this to others of his supposed to be same race?

“I really can’t dig it.

Frances Whippel”

## APPENDIX K

**“This Happened Here?” [Thursday, February 12, 1970 – *The Delta Democrat-Times*]**

“What follows is a semi-chronological commentary on a series of related events we find hard to believe happened in this nation this year. Or perhaps we are naïve, and what happens represents the wave of the future.” “A number of students at MVSC decided recently that conditions there were unsatisfactory. Acting through their student body leaders, they petitioned the president of their college for certain constructive changes. Not one of the thirty points on their list could be considered even remotely radical. President J. H. White responded by turning Mississippi Valley into an armed camp.

“The students remained peaceful, although the sight of janitors and other maintenance personnel armed as newly designated guards could hardly have increased their respect for the administration or its response to their demands. They decided to boycott classes in support of the demands. Two of their leaders were subsequently arrested on charges of obstructing entrance and exit at a campus building and placed in Leflore County Jail.

“The students still remained peaceful, although the boycott became almost 100 per cent effective. President White, perhaps by now acting on orders of the governor’s office or the state college board—to both of whom he has always been more responsive than to his students brought in a large contingent of special policemen from all over the state. He also, apparently, set the stage for a mass arrest, which finally materialized on Tuesday afternoon. In what was obviously a well-coordinated, well-prepared plan, campus security guards, special police, highway patrolmen, and county lawmen arrested and took to prison almost 900 students whose only offense was that they were peacefully demonstrating on the college campus.

“To repeat, this happened not in response to an armed insurrection or violence-filled disorder but as the college’s and the state’s response to a student demonstration which was asking for constructive changes. Despite the fact that there were at least a half-dozen other possible routes which the authorities could have travelled, they chose to treat the students like so many hardened criminals or fire-breathing, armed revolutionaries. It would have been absurd if it had not been so sickening.

“Those students happened to have been black, which alone explains how such a travesty of due process or intelligence could have been perpetrated. The official overreaction would have done credit to Czechoslovakia’s Communist stooge regime. Almost 900 students, whom no one has to this moment accused of a single act of violence or destruction, were carted off like so many cattle to a place set aside for the lawless outcasts of this society.

“We’re afraid that some students learned a few lessons on the Mississippi Valley State College campus this week. One possible lesson is that peaceful protest doesn’t accomplish very much. Another is that you might as well be hung for a major offense as a minor one. We hope that isn’t what this week taught, but who could legitimately expect anything else? The students deserve an official apology. What they’ll probably get, barring speedy federal or state court intervention, is a fine or, possibly, a jail sentence.

“If this does represent the future (and right now the response seems to be getting considerable support in the white community) every last one of us is in trouble.”

## APPENDIX L

### **“The United States Had Role In Arrest of 894 Mississippi Students” by PHILIP D. CARTER [*Washington Post*, February 19, 1970]**

Last week//Nine days ago, near the Delta cotton town of Itta Bena, a tough, hand-picked posse of Mississippi lawmen arrested 894 black student demonstrators and herded them into buses bound for the state penitentiary at Parchman.

It was the largest mass arrest of college students in the nation’s history.

It was the first ever planned with the advice and assistance of the U.S. Justice Department in Washington.

And all the arresting officers were black.

Not only precedents were shattered. The mass arrest – coordinated by Mississippi’s Federally funded Law Enforcement Assistance Division – at least temporarily broke the back of a successful student boycott at Mississippi Valley State College.

For the Justice Department’s fledgling Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA), the arrests marked the quiet beginning of one of the Nixon administration’s potentially most volatile policies – Federal ‘technical assistance’ in local suppression of ‘campus disorders.’

“We’re real proud of it, the way (Mississippi police) handled it,” declared George Murphy, director of LEAA’s Atlanta regional office. “There wasn’t any bloodshed.”

Charged with blocking a public road on campus and disobeying police who ordered them to disperse, all 894 demonstrators – one-third of the student body of 2,500 – were suspended from school.

After 24 hours of imprisonment, they were released from Parchman on bond and permitted to return to the campus, collect their personal belongings and go home.

Valley State’s beleaguered Negro president, J. H. White, whose policies were the target of the student boycott, announced that the state-supported school will follow a policy of ‘selective admissions’ when students register for the second term.

Students widely believed that none of the college’s elected student government association leaders, all of whom helped direct the boycott, would be readmitted. White summarily fired two faculty members who advised the demonstrators.

For the time being at least, the events in Itta Beta stand as a victory for one of the strangest alliances ever assembled in the name of law and order: Valley State President White, Mississippi’s segregationist Gov. John Bell Williams, his all-white State Highway Safety Patrol, 58 black policemen from various cities in the state, and the Department of Justice.

Until now, the Justice Department’s role has gone largely unnoticed.

Federal involvement in the campus arrests grew from the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, which created LEAA as a Justice Department agency for federal economic and technical assistance to local and state law enforcement agencies.

Under terms of the act, the State of Mississippi (like other states) created a state commission on law enforcement assistance its operating agency, known as the division of law enforcement assistance.

Although Mississippi’s population is a least 40% black, the commission’s members are all white, most of them high-ranking representatives of state and local law enforcement agencies.

For fiscal 1969, the Mississippi commission applied for and received a Federal “action grant” of \$288,405. The Justice Department did not challenge the racial composition of the Mississippi group.

The group's plans provided for "staff assistance" by the new state law enforcement assistance division to state and local police agencies in "developing plans and procedures for coping with civil disorders (riot control and natural disasters) and organized crime."

That program won Federal approval. Thus when campus protest began to swell at Valley State College early this month, Federally sponsored machinery already had been established for containing what the state's white political establishment perceived as a potential black insurrection.

"But as campus revolts go, Valley State's was mild. At stake was a list of 30 demands sponsored and prepared by the college's Student Government Assn. and presented to Pres. White.

"The students demanded academic scholarships. Pres. White agreed to immediate approval of ten. The only scholarships previously awarded were for athletes and members of Valley State's crack marching band.

"The students also demanded SGA control of the college's student activity fund, a coin-operated laundry for students and clarification of 'fictitious laboratory fees.' White denied those demands, but he approved others like relaxation of the campus dress code. He also granted the students the right to name new college buildings.

"The SGA called for a student boycott. Within a few days, it was more than 95 percent effective, and White – with the backing of the state's all-white Board of Trustees of Institutions of Higher Learnings – asked for outside police assistance.

"Two of his black campus security officers, he said, had been injured by students, and students had been threatened by boycott leaders. However, he filed no formal charges.

"In the state capital of Jackson, officers of the board of trustees met with the state commissioner of public safety and Kenneth Fairly, executive director of the state Law Enforcement Assistance Division.

Then Fairly called Washington and Atlanta LEAA officials. Washington's Paul Estaver and Atlanta's George Murphy agreed that the best solution was to handle the Valley State protest with black policemen.

Fairly scoured the state and found 58 from local police departments.

On Feb. 8, they moved onto the campus and the next day arrested two student boycott leaders on charges of blocking entry to a campus building. The following day the black officers interrupted a protest march and arrested 894 more students.

While the arrests proceeded, white highway troopers and Leflore County sheriff's deputies blocked newsman's attempted entry to the campus. Reporters later complained of threats and official harassment.

But on campus, all went smoothly. As Fairly later reported, there was no violence, no injuries, and no pictures of "a white cop with his nightstick mashing the head of a black student." Gov. Williams, said Fairly, was pleased.

"What we liked was the evidence of black professionalism, black command leadership," Fairly said.

Justice Department cooperation was "excellent," he said. "We were in constant contact."

Department officials have "looked at this situation and think it has some application for use elsewhere," he added.

"All of us in this business are looking for new ways to handle old problems."

## APPENDIX M

**“900 busted in miss.” by thomas h. wirth [Monday, February 23, 1970 – *The Great Speckled Bird*, vol. 3 no. 8, p. 12-13]**

“To President White, Mississippi Valley State is ‘my campus.’ Or, more aptly, his plantation. He has been president of MVSC since it was founded in 1950. He pridefully takes credit for the many square, institutional, yellow-brick buildings which sit on this former cotton field in the rich, flat farmlands of the Mississippi delta.

“Most of the buildings, however, were built after 1954, and a skeptic might suspect that *Brown v. Board of Education* had as much to do with their construction as President White’s influence with the Mississippi legislature. If conditions had been too bad at Mississippi Valley, black students might have tried to enter Ole Miss or Mississippi State instead.

“In any case, the price of those buildings was high indeed. As in all black, state supported colleges in the South, the main duty of the administration is, to paraphrase Ralph Ellison, to ‘keep the niggers running.’ Or at least quiet and out of sight.

“That, of course, rules out any real education, because everyone knows that an educated man is dangerous, particularly if he is black and lives in Mississippi.

“Naturally, MVSC has no programs involving students in efforts for change within the black community. Such programs, if effective, would bring a strong reaction from the local powers-that-be, and their displeasure would quickly be communicated to the legislature. Moreover, students would have the experience of growing intellectually while simultaneously working for the welfare of their people and maintaining their ties with the community. That would run counter to the primary lesson black colleges are designed to teach: ‘making it’ is incompatible with social responsibility. You make it on your own, by leaving your people behind.

“Every effort is made to isolate the student from his background and his environment. The very location of the campus – more than a mile from tiny Itta Bena and seven miles from the outskirts of Greenwood—is part of this effort. Students are taught to dress ‘well,’ to speak ‘properly,’ and to appreciate ‘culture’ so that they will be strangers when they return to the shacks and streets from which they came. They are ‘whitewashed,’ but not given the education they need to compete in ‘Whitey’s’ world. They end up teaching in the black schools, preparing a new generation of students for life in Mississippi.

“Student demands for extension of dormitory visiting and curfew hours for young women and abolition of rules regulating dress may sound frivolous to the uninitiated, but they strike at the heart of the system of indoctrination.

“The black citizens of Mississippi pay taxes. They are entitled to services in return. Their children are entitled to an education.

“The ‘good nigger,’ however, does not demand; he requests. Mildly. Meekly. Hat in hand.

“The administration of MVSC goes to the Mississippi legislature hat in hand. Each new building, each appropriation is celebrated as a gift from ‘the Man.’ It is a favor, and favors generate obligations. Obligations to help maintain control. Obligations to inform and advice. Obligations to render faithful service.

“On the campus the roles are reversed. President White plays the ‘good nigger’ to the Board of Trustees and the legislature, but on the plantation he is the supreme master. His role is ‘preserving the college for the students and protecting them from foolish ideas.’

Students learn the role of the ‘good nigger.’ Scholarships, favors, and jobs are dispensed to those who ‘cooperate’—those who have a ‘healthy attitude,’ those who are properly grateful. ‘Troublemakers’ and ‘agitators’ who stand up for their rights are penalized.

“‘Uncle Tom’ has another aspect, however. He is no fool. He is a master of the arts of exploitation and deception. The student learns this aspect of the role as well.

“He learns to exploit weaknesses; he cultivates valuable ‘friends’—the instructor, who gives grades; the departmental secretary, who types exams; personnel in the business office, where accounts are kept, and the registrar’s office, where grades are recorded.

COLOR HIM AGNEW

*Dr. James H. White, fearless leader against the student unrest at Mississippi Valley State, staunchly stood up to student accusations:*

*‘If I am an Uncle Tom, then what this country needs is more Uncle Toms.’”*

“The good nigger survives in an unjust system. One cannot but admire the exploits of a talented ‘Tom.’ Survival is no mean accomplishment. But ‘Uncle Tom’ survives by *using* the system; he cannot *change* the system. As long as the system survives, the whites who control Mississippi are content.

“First-class living conditions on a campus not only cost money, they might give students first-class ideas about themselves. A shoddiness around the edges pervades the MVSC campus. Building maintenance is slipshod. Classroom windows don’t close. Laundry facilities are inadequate. Stalls in the restrooms have no doors; showers have no curtains. There are only two telephones in each dorm—one pay phone and one extension. Landscaping is minimal, and inadequate drainage turns lawns into swamps when the rains come. Second-class facilities for second-class citizens.

“Second-class facilities; second-class services; a second-class education. How could it be otherwise with an overworked, underpaid faculty, recruited with docility rather than competence in mind? Four of the thirty students demands call for improvement of the faculty. President White’s response is that no problem exists in that area.

“Courses emphasize theory over practice—the arid and academic over the vital and practical. One learns about the Constitution by memorizing its clauses rather than tracing the judicial history of *Brown v. Board of Education*. One learns about the “American two-party system” rather than political reality in the one-party South. One analyzes the blood relationship among medieval royalty, not among the families that control Leflore county. One learns about taxation without representation in the Thirteen Colonies in 1776, not in Mississippi in 1970. One studies the French Revolution, not the Greenwood Movement; the murder of Marat, not the murder of Medgar Evers; the ethics of Aristotle, not Martin Luther King; the plays of Maxwell Anderson, not LeRoi Jones.

“A second-class citizen has no rights. If he had rights on campus, he might start demanding rights off campus. If he grew accustomed to fair treatment on campus, he might come to expect it off campus, too. No surer way exists for producing an ‘uppity nigger.’

“Campus security officers are notoriously contemptuous of students’ dignity and rights at MVSC. The only violence during the present crisis occurred during the first day of the class boycott after a security guard struck a coed.

“Last year, 196 students who were holding a sit-in in the college gym were summarily expelled and bussed to Jackson. Without a hearing. Without even time to get their toothbrushes.

“The mass arrest of 889 students last week while peacefully exercising their constitutional right to protest is the latest and most outrageous example of a total contempt for students rights. President White had already threatened to expel all students who failed to return to class on the fourth day of the boycott. Then he ‘clarified’ his threat: ‘Students must either be in class Monday [February 9] ... or they must be off

campus. 'This doesn't mean that they will be expelled ... They can come back when they are willing to attend classes.'

"Students continued to boycott. President White forbade further marches and demonstrations. The students kept right on marching and demonstrating. Then they were arrested.

"The college was closed. All scholarships were suspended. The campus will reopen this week under a 'selective admissions' policy. Clearly, 'troublemakers' and 'agitators' will be selectively excluded.

"As we went to press, all arrested students were out on bail, and the trial had been postponed. To enforce his control of the campus, however, President White also ousted two professors involved in the protests—Richard Tucker of the history department and Noel Thompson of the economics department.

"All rather depressing. But the winds of change are blowing.

"Last year, many of the expelled and deported students returned to campus. Protests continued. Negotiations were conducted and concessions extracted. The expelled students were readmitted under court order—their due process rights had been violated. Attempts to eliminate student leaders over the summer were blocked by students who kept in touch with their lawyers.

"President White was determined that last year's episode would not be repeated. 'We will handle this situation if it comes. We will ask for all the help we need ... we intend to keep order on the campus.' When the campus closed, he said 'It looked like this same thing would happen every year unless we put our foot down.'

"After a night and a day in jail, all students were ordered released on nominal bond or personal recognizance by a State Circuit Judge. Hearings are scheduled in Federal District Court to decide whether the constitutional rights of the students are being violated by requiring them to re-register when the college re-opens. The District Judge warned state attorneys that the basis for the 'selective readmission' plan will have to be explained.

"Those with experience in such situations expect President White's retirement to be announced sometime after the crisis has cooled. He has not done his job. The niggers are out of hand.

"His replacement will be a shrewder Uncle Tom. Curfews will be relaxed, telephones and shower curtains installed, maintenance improved and appropriations increased. The faculty, terrified by past crises and fearful of new ones, will remain demoralized. Window-dressing will be added, but the system will remain.

"Unless...Unless the student body sustains the pressure, moving to new and more fundamental issues as the old ones are resolved. Unless parents and the entire black community mobilizes itself behind these courageous students who have risked their own 'sweet thing' for the sake of change.

"The problems of Mississippi Valley State College cannot be solved in isolation from the problems of the state as a whole. Politics in Mississippi are the politics of race, and the educational system is the pivot on which the whole structure of oppression rests."



## APPENDIX N

### “State of MissEducation” by Dr. Richard D. Tucker (Greenwood, Miss.) [May 4-15, 1970 – *Great Speckled Bird*, vol. 3, issue 18, p. 14]

“The recent upheaval at MVSC was not a spur-of-the-moment manifestation. It was the product of years of misadministration, authoritarianism, non-vocal dissatisfaction among the vast majority of the faculty and staff, and inhumane and inconsiderate treatment of students. The most puzzling aspect of the entire matter is how the members of the faculty sit idly by, except for a few dissidents, and allow themselves to be completely dominated by the administration.

“To support the above allegations, share with me the following statements and observations, which point out the tremendous lack of understanding of the functions and purposes of a college, on the part of the administration at MVSC.

1. How debilitating it was to listen to the constant refrain about what had been built from a snake-infested cotton patch—day after day, year after year. Yet, we were aware of what is actually at the college. Hoards of mosquitoes, crickets, frogs, and beetles, roaches, mice, and rats infest dormitories and cafeteria. No underground drainage system for the campus. Consequently, when it rains one has to virtually use a canoe to travel from one section of the campus to the other.
2. The use of educational jargon such as ‘providing quality education’—when in reality 75 to 85 percent of the students who graduate from MVSC have not mastered the critical and fundamental skills of reading, writing, spelling, and computation. This is borne out by the ensuing statement of the Evaluation Committee of the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges (SACS): ‘The students at Mississippi Valley State College have the poorest speech patterns of any college students whom we have met on any college campus.’
3. The amusing, but disconcerting and highly ridiculous testimonials which were held at intervals to pledge full loyalty to the president of the college. From these meetings emerged such hypocritical clichés and platitudes as ‘I am behind you 150 percent; if other faculty members do not support you unequivocally then you should leave.’ (Uttered by a faculty member.). The mutual admiration society continued ad infinitum and ad nauseam. The entire proceedings were reminiscent of an old-fashioned revival meeting. Very far removed from what one would expect at a gathering of supposedly professional people.

So much time wasted on such trivialities and not a moment spent considering the extremely poor educational background and training of the students. No mention made of revising the curriculum to fit the needs of the students, providing a strong remedial program, securing reading specialists (not persons who pursue about six hours in studying reading and then return, calling themselves reading specialists), etc.

4. How maddening it was to listen, quite frequently, to a recital such as the following: ‘They [always some nebulous ‘they’] told me that you are trying to destroy *my school*. I know who you are and I am going to get rid of each one of you.’ Even such paternalistic nonsense as ‘my boys and girls used to love me—but one or two of you have corrupted their minds, and turned them against me.’
5. The sad travesty on the dignity of man was made quite evident by the subservient attitudes of the administration and many faculty members. Students were constantly harassed and told to be respectful to the ‘good white folks;’ say yes sir and yes’um; yet honkies who came to the campus had no respect for administration, faculty or students. These ‘clay-eaters’ and ‘rednecks’ never extended courtesy titles to anyone. Often using boy, girl, ‘nigger,’ ‘nigra’ and other degrading modes of address. Of course, nothing was said or done by the administration or faculty to correct such denigrating remarks and galling disrespect.

“My experiences while serving as a professor of history at MVSC for approximately five years, permit me to state that Mississippi Valley State College is not a college in any sense of the word. It is a hinterland-situated on a spongy, water-logged swamp which provides fertile ground for the furtherance of ignorance and fawning servility. It is a mass of undistinguished, non-functional cinderblock buildings provided by the honky power structure as a show place, when they were well aware that the ‘separate but equal’ doctrine would be declared unconstitutional. What did they (whites) care about the quality and kind of education received by blacks?

“However, there is a boom in concern among them now because desegregation of schools poses a threat. These same blacks who rated so low on their educational totem pole are now entering and being considered for teaching positions in formerly all-white elementary and high schools. Therefore, one is constantly beleaguered by studies reporting the lack of command of basic skills by black students. Most assuredly such studies had been done before and the power structure knew about the poor academic performances of many black students. Why wasn’t the administration informed of this and requested to do something about it? The reason is simply that for centuries these black teachers were teaching only black students. So who cared about their preparation or qualifications?

“In order to alleviate the situation, *it is imperative that there be a complete removal of the entire administration at Mississippi Valley State College.* It should be replaced by persons who are both educators and administrators. They should be sensitive to the needs of the faculty, students, staff, and community. The new administration must realize that the nation’s colleges and universities have increasingly become the focal point of change in our society and the source of its leadership. The president of the college needs to understand and provide a delineation of where the responsibility for educational leadership properly belongs and in what degree it is shared by different parts of the academic community.

“The function of a new administration at Mississippi Valley State College would be that of creating a sense of community among the constituent elements which make up the college. The genius of its leadership would be the persuasive power it could exert rather than in its directional authority. It seems clear that authoritarianism in practice does not harmonize well with the objectives of education or the nature of the educational institution. In regard to the attitude of the administration toward faculty, staff, and students, there must be respect for individuals, faith in the objectivity and fairness of these groups; willingness to explain and persuade rather than order.

“As long as any vestige of the present administration remains at Mississippi Valley State College, I beseech parents not to allow your sons and daughters to return to or matriculate at the college where meaningful education experiences are practically non-existent; where they will be taught subservency and be subjected to humiliating and degrading experiences. Believe me, your sons and daughters will not have the equivalent of a good fifth grade education when they graduate from MVSC. Your task is to *‘Oust the present president of Mississippi Valley State College and his flunky entourage’ before 900 more young black males and females are again stigmatized by imprisonment in Parchman State Penitentiary for exercising their constitutional rights.’*”

- dr. richard d. tucker  
greenwood, miss.

## VITA

### EDUCATION

#### **Master of Arts, Southern Studies, University of Mississippi, 2021**

- Thesis: “Agitate, Agitate, Agitate”: Stories from Mississippi Valley, Parchman, and the Largest Mass Arrest of Students in U.S. History”
- Thesis Committee: Dr. Andrew Harper, Dr. Jessica Wilkerson, and Ralph Eubanks

#### **Bachelor of Arts, Classics and Southern Studies, University of Mississippi, 2018**

- Graduated *magna cum laude* from the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College
- Honors Thesis: “To ‘Converse with the Most Excellent Men’: Classical Education, Cultural Capital, and the Formation of a Ruling Class in the Antebellum South”
- Thesis Committee: Dr. Ted Ownby (Advisor); Dr. Katie McKee; Dr. Molly Pasco-Pranger

### ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

**Teaching Assistant**, *Introduction to Film*, University of Mississippi, January-May 2022.

**Graduate Assistant**, *Southern Documentary Project*, University of Mississippi, August 2021-May 2022.

**Graduate Assistant** for James G. Thomas, Jr., Associate Director for Publications, Center for the Study of Southern Culture, August 2019-May 2020. Wrote articles and copyedited for the Center’s publication, *Southern Register*, and the *Mississippi Encyclopedia*. Contributed author biographies for the *Southern Literary Trail* website.

**Circulations Assistant**, *Living Blues Magazine*, University of Mississippi, August 2019-May 2020.

**Team Member**, *Parchman Oral History Project*, University of Mississippi, June 2019-August 2019.

**Graduate Assistant**, *Institutional Research, Effectiveness, and Planning*, University of Mississippi, August 2018-May 2019. Primarily assisted Dr. Katie Busby, the Director of IREP, with the University’s Reaffirmation of Accreditation as a Level-6 Research Institute. Conducted focus group with undergraduates. Served on committees in preparation for on-site visit and University’s Quality Enhancement Plan.

**Research Assistant** for Dr. Simone Delerme, Department of Anthropology and Southern Studies, University of Mississippi, Summer 2017. Conducted and transcribed interviews and compiled data for research project on immigrant communities in northern Mississippi.

**Library Assistant, Visual Collections, Archives and Special Collections**, J. D. Williams Library, University of Mississippi, February 2014-January 2017. Work-study position.

## CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

**Black Power at Ole Miss**, Oxford, Mississippi, February 2020.

- Presented Film: “Black Power at Ole Miss.”

**Making and Unmaking Mass Incarceration**, Oxford, Mississippi, December 2019.

- Presented film: “MS70” and participated on panel discussion with W. Ralph Eubanks and other members of Parchman Oral History Project

**The Classical Association of the Middle West and South**, Albuquerque, New Mexico, April 2018.

- Presented paper: “Cultural Capital and the Formation of a Southern Ruling Class”

## AWARDS/HONORS

**Graduate Summer Research Assistantship Program**, University of Mississippi, Summer 2020 and summer 2021 to support summer research for Master of Arts thesis.

**Best Undergraduate Research Paper**, Center for the Study of Southern Culture, University of Mississippi, 2018.

Awarded for Honors Thesis: “To ‘Converse with the Most Excellent Men’: Classical Education, Cultural Capital, and the Formation of a Ruling Class in the Antebellum South.”

**Eta Sigma Phi**, National Honorary Classical Fraternity, University of Mississippi. Invited Spring 2014.