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Yearbook Analysis: Southern Symbols

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Ole Miss Yearbook Write Up

For our yearbook project we were supposed to look at 10 yearbooks but over the course of the project, I kept coming back to the question what is the trend for the Ole Miss yearbook history as a whole pertaining to southern heritage and the words southern, pride, heritage, battle flag, and statue? The reason for choosing these words were sparked by the love of southern history and the 1979 yearbook and it being covered up. So, I thought about the South from a historical perspective what top five words come to mind, and the words listed above were the words I came up with. I also had very little resistance in finding these words or pictures that represent these words and or their meaning. So, I looked at all the yearbooks from 1897 – 1997 to study the patterns of how previous generations and decades boasted about the South. There are some definite trends I have found while looking over these yearbooks.

Up until the 1960 there was very little southern symbols, but you do see a slow gradual increase southern symbols from 1890's starting at 12 and going up every decade to 13, 314 (1910's mainly buildings), 119, 60, 62, and 181. The battle flag was not introduced in the yearbooks till the 20's and in the whole decade it appears 15 times¹. Between 1920's and 1950 the battle flag was depicted 15, 10, 11, 100 times there was an increase was very low and slow and pretty surprising because during the 1920's and 1930's was the height of the lost cause. Also, the two decades with the most references to the confederate statue were 1910's and 1940's and the 1910's makes sense because the confederate statue on campus was resurrected in 1907 so it would make sense the following decade depicts the statue a lot since it was resurrected in the late 1900's. Then the only conclusion I can come up with for the 1940's this is 80 years after the war between the states and this would be either the grandchildren or great grandchildren of the

¹ Chart 1

civil war veterans, so they were looking for a way to honor their grandparents or great grandparents and it's the decade the school is a century old.

The main trend I noticed is southern symbols did not make a drastic numerical increase until the 1960's. Which after doing my research the conclusion I have come to is this was sparked when James Meredith integrated in to Ole Miss and vastly change the dynamic at Ole Miss and southerners saw as the first attack on their heritage and southern pride. This decade surprisingly brought the second most southern symbols of any decade only surpassed by the 1970's. After doing my research the conclusion I have come to is the reason for this is starting in the 60's southerners could see the writing on the wall that their heritage, pride, and society was under attack. From their point of view the biggest sign that their heritage pride, and society was under attack was James Meredith integrating Ole Miss because before 1962 the largest number of southern symbols were 314 but that was in the 1910's and the main southern symbols were depictions of southern buildings like the lyceum and ventress hall². At the same time, they did not feel like they had to go overboard in showing their southern pride and heritage till that point.

Just looking at the symbol of the battle flag which was a military flag in the 1950s the battle flag was depicted 100 times whereas in the 1960 the battle flag was depicted 824 times. Which is a difference of 724 times. At the same time until the late 1950's southerners did not feel like their heritage, pride and society was under attack. After doing my research the conclusion I have come to is after they saw they were under attack they dug in on keeping their symbols and their family pride because they felt like if they gave in, they would keep taking more and more until they took their heritage, pride, and dignity.

² Chart 1

Then in the 1970's there were 1,166 southern symbols³. This is a large increase in southern pride and would peak in the 1970's but would remain high 1990's. After doing my research the conclusion I have come to is in the 1990's the battle flag was depicted 208 times. Which is still a pretty high number but the 1990's would be the first hypothetical domino of decades for the decline in southern pride, heritage, and honor.

After doing my research the conclusion I have come to is one of the reasons there was such a decline in southern pride and heritage was because of Robert Khayat he was one of two chancellors in the 1990's. The most offensive part of this great decline in southern heritage and pride was that Kayak was Colonel Reb (Mr. Ole Miss) in 1960 which was the highest honor a true male student could receive while at Ole Miss. Then Kayak has the audacity to turn his back on Mississippi (his native state) and the South itself, and he received his bachelors and doctorate from Ole Miss according to Wikipedia⁴. Also, on page 354 of the 1991 yearbook there is a segment about the battle flag which says "during the past decade controversy over the now 'unofficial' flag of Ole Miss, has continued to grow⁵" so even since the 1980's if not late 1970's when southern symbols and especially the battle flag had been under attack for a decade or more. After doing my research the conclusion I have come to is this controversy stems all the way back to the 1960's. Did it help that according to Dr. McGuire the students in the black student union were arrested in the 1970's? No. At the same time that was the police and not the Ole Miss students.

This brought up a bigger question of why a military flag from 100 years ago at the time (1960's) was used and seen as this horrible symbol? After doing my research the conclusion

³ Chart 2

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Khayat

⁵ 1991 yearbook bottom left

I have come to is that these symbols were vastly miss used by the wrong people. This is even demonstrated in the yearbooks. There are three or four years where the KKK was in the yearbook one was in the 1930's another was in 1983 for example. If we dig deeper the battle flag was never meant to be used in this way by the original users. The original use of the battle flag was to be a military flag of the army of Virginia, I think. This would be like saying a military flag from today is an evil symbol when in actuality the government behind the flag is the problem not the flag itself.

Some the things I have found in the yearbooks that surprised me was the lack of southern symbols in the 1890's because this is the time period where these veterans were professor age and why was there not more to commemorate these veterans? Also I found it strange that the highest decade for southern symbols was the 1970's I would have thought it would be the 1960's because of integration but after doing my research the conclusion I have come to is the Ole Miss society at the time staff and students let these feeling build up until the 1970's when they arrested the black student union and they saw that their southern heritage, pride, and southern identity was slowly being taken away from them little by little.

Another thing that surprised me about the yearbooks was the 1979 yearbook cover. The 1979 yearbook is a depiction of the stands at the time with a bunch of battle flags. My question before spring break 2023 was why is this the only one that is censored because other year books have the battle flag and others have the confederate monument on them? Through this projects process I discovered that the Lyceum (The Ole Miss Administration) requested it be covered up saying, "Regarding the question about covering up the 1979 yearbook cover: I spoke with my supervisor, who said that that was a request from the Lyceum. Their opinion (as I understand it) is that a photo suggesting a stadium full of 50,000 people waving Confederate flags is more

sensitive/triggering than an illustration of a single flag.” This shows that the lyceum (The Ole Miss Administration) wants to censor students, staff and alumni who support the south its history. The reason this is such a big deal is they are trying to hide Ole Miss history and for my project if I had not went to class where we went to special collections and saw that yearbook myself, I would not have known about it and missed all the valuable information in that yearbook. After talking to Professor McGuire and thinking about the questions she asked me which were “Lyceum's involvement about the 1979 yearbooks is worth considering - but is it ONLY about silencing white southerners? Or could there be other reasons for wanting to ‘paper over’ the reality of that cover? (What are some other likely options?)⁶” After doing my research the conclusion I have come to is that is this decision about trying to silence older southerners on one hand. Yes. At the same time, I think that once again the reason behind this decision more than likely has to do with money. The lyceum (The Ole Miss Administration) is scared to death they will make national news in a bad light and all of these out of state kid’s parents will try to get their kids not to go to Ole Miss because of a little controversy for a short period of time. The reason the lyceum (The Ole Miss Administration) is so scared of losing out of state kids is we pay three time what in state kids pay for tuition. Which on one hand makes sense at the same time the lyceum (The Ole Miss Administration) needs to listen to the in state kids more because these are the kids and future adults living in Mississippi because the majority of out of state kids will leave once they graduate.

⁶ Professor McGuire email