

Chapter 20 Pushing the System

"The whole discussion of civil rights is an insult ... as an American citizen – to me, James Meredith – because that assumes that any of my rights are up for negotiation. And they are not." James Meredith

James Meredith, a bright and strategic Air Force veteran – and a highly individualistic *Ayn Rand* type – applied for admission to the University of Mississippi in January of 1961, launching an astounding legal revolt against white supremacy in his home state.

When Meredith first applied to Mississippi's revered university, he told the registrar that he was black – and was rejected. The state began a strategy of applying every conceivable way to block Meredith's admission, but seven months later, on September 10, 1962, the 5th U. S. Circuit Court of Appeals ordered Meredith's enrollment to Ole Miss to be "made effective immediately."

James Meredith finally got onto Mississippi's most prestigious campus on September 30. A Korean War veteran and often described by his biographer William Doyle as a brilliant strategist, Meredith worked the system with style, pitting Mississippi's Governor Barnett against the Kennedys to ensure his success. (Earlier, Barnett spoke at Princeton University, declaring segregation as best for both North and South.)

Meredith's challenge triggered what some historians have called "the gravest conflict between federal and state authority since the Civil War." French reporter Paul Guihard and young Oxford juke box repairman Ray Gunter lost their lives and at least 160 marshals, pulled from the ranks of various federal agencies to maintain order, were injured.

The white riot that exploded into a ferocious battle saw U. S. federal marshals fighting for their lives in hand-to-hand combat.

"I was more frightened at Mississippi," said one marshal, "than I was at Pearl Harbor or any other time during the war."¹

During the riots, some Highway Patrolmen had "encouraged the restless crowd to demonstrate against U. S. marshals," historian James Silver observed.

Keeping the Culture at Ole Miss

The University of Mississippi serves as a state shrine to the Civil War. The school that became a Confederate hospital for wounded soldiers remained one of few standing structures of importance when the War ended. And so, an attack on this campus over one hundred-fourteen years later seemed almost inconceivable to Mississippi's white, affluent caste, many themselves graduates of Ole Miss.

James Meredith, the young black man who led the modern-day assault, knew exactly what he was doing when he chose to play out his personal integration battle on the prestigious Oxford campus.

IT WAS ON NOVEMBER 6 of 1848 that students first entered surroundings described by one early settler as "a fairyland [of] park like forests and waving native grasses." Founders had selected the rural town of Oxford for their university after deeming it an appropriate "sylvan exile" to foster serious study.²

Author Nadine Cohodas, in describing the colorful history surrounding Mississippi's best-known institution of higher learning, quoted one of the school's first educators:

"Send your sons to other states and you estrange them from their native land [and] our institutions are endangered."

His warning served as an "oblique reference to the rift in the young country over slavery and the growing fervor of abolitionists anxious to impose their will on the slaveholding states," Cohodas observed.

The school's founding fathers believed that education was far more than learning and refinement; there was implicit understanding that education equated to survival ... "the process by which a culture transmits itself across the generations."

From its opening day, the campus center was the Lyceum, an imposing three-story structure with a front portico supported by six large columns ... named after the garden at Athens where Aristotle taught, "a good fit for a building that matched its Greek forerunner in architectural style and function."

During the Civil War, the Lyceum, dormitories and faculty residences next to it, were all used to care for Mississippi's wounded soldiers. A century later, when a civil war of a different sort broke out, the Lyceum "symbolized a long-lost way of life, calling up ghosts of a past battle to witness the fury of a new," wrote Cohodas, placing in context Meredith's entrance into the university.

RACE WAS ALWAYS a fixture at the University, from the school's very beginning. The campus, Oxford, and the rest of the state "reflected the twin ingredients of Southern cultural cohesion: white supremacy and black slavery. Some slaves even accompanied their masters to school, to perform the same chores there as they had at home."

Any breach, whether real or imagined, of the "peculiar institution," the South's euphemism for slavery, was unimaginable and would not be tolerated, as the university's third president – the only "damn Yankee" ever to head the school – discovered. Frederick A. P. Barnard of Massachusetts arrived in Oxford to teach science prior to the Civil War. Widely considered to be "a scholar of the first rank," Barnard attempted in 1858 to reorganize the university but his "apparent pro-Union sympathies" made him suspect as the conflict between the North and South was becoming serious.

Cohodas tells the story that one May evening in 1859, Barnard and his wife were away from home when a student broke in and assaulted their female slave, "Jane." The student was identified and the faculty declined to punish him, noting in an official resolution that evidence against the student was not legally sufficient. Mississippi law did not allow slave testimony as admissible against a white person.

Barnard expelled the offender, regardless and his critics accused him of using the woman's testimony as basis for the expulsion, a charge he denied. After legislators and the board of trustees investigated the incident, Barnard was exonerated, but knew his days in Oxford were numbered and left in little more than a year.

When Mississippi seceded from the Union, its articles of secession, adopted on January 9, 1861, were drafted by L. Q. C. Lamar, a well-known Mississippian and mathematics professor at the university. "It was the first of many bonds that would be forged between the Oxford campus and the Confederate cause."

As news of secession came to the University of Mississippi, enthused students replaced the flag of the United States with the flag of the newly independent state of Mississippi. Members of a campus literary society burned two abolition books in the school library and motioned to buy a copy of the secession ordinance, in a show of sentiment. One professor was fired for writing a letter with “Northern sentiments.”

Anticipating the war, students organized a company – the “University Greys.” Confederate president Jefferson Davis and other elders opposed the move – Davis calling it “grinding the seed corn of the republic” to send the young men to fight. All but five students left campus once the war began and by fall the campus was finally closed to students.

General Grant had intended to burn down the campus when he first came into Oxford in December 1862. Two professors persuaded the general not to do so, and “there was widespread speculation that ‘damn Yankee’ Barnard, the recently departed chancellor, tried to help out by appealing to Grant to spare the school.”

The town of Oxford was burned down eighteen months later. The school was not burned but its buildings were in terrible shape by the time the war ended.

The Battle of Oxford

Only buildings of the University of Mississippi were spared during the 1864 destruction of the town of Oxford. Mississippi’s fate was already sealed once Ulysses S. Grant took Vicksburg in the summer of 1863 and afterwards Lincoln appointed General Grant Supreme Commander of all Union forces and William Sherman to command the western theater of operations. During the summer of 1864, there was one aim – to affect the supply lines keeping Sherman’s troops the march in Alabama and Georgia. At Brices Cross Roads, Confederate forces under the command of General Nathan B. Forrest confronted the larger number of Union troops and took a beating. Active in this campaign were several African American units, including the 55th, 59th, 61st and 68th Colored Infantry regiments, the 3rd Colored Cavalry Regiments, and the 2nd Colored Light Artillery Regiment. “At this stage in the war, Black troops were aware of the Fort Pillow massacre and the peril of falling into the hands of Confederate forces.”ⁱⁱⁱ

During the Civil War approximately 1,850 patients had been cared for on the campus – more than 700 of them died. The soldiers were buried in a cemetery on campus, but their grave markers were later destroyed years later when workmen failed to protect them during a cleanup of the area.

Mounds that covered the graves were leveled, and grass was planted over the entire spot, hiding the final resting place for the dead soldiers. A monument still stood, placed by the United Daughters of the Confederacy, several years after the war’s end.

When the school reopened, it was a different student body. Before the Civil War, nearly all students were the sons of wealthy white parents; antebellum per capita wealth in Mississippi was higher than in any other state. Returning students, according to the university’s official catalog, were “the sons of parents who had been wealthy but whose wealth had been entirely swept away” during the fighting.

One of many postwar shrines, the religion of the Lost Cause was evident at commencement exercises in 1867, barely two years after the fighting stopped. The Reverend T. D. Witherspoon, a university graduate, was the main speaker, “his florid prose typical of so much of the Lost Cause literature and reflecting a deep suspicion of [the] outside.”

Witherspoon called on the young men to preserve and revere the past in a speech he titled “The Appeal of the South to Its Educated Men.” It was an appeal “which comes up from her watered fields, her desecrated altars, and her smoking ruins – from her darkened homes, her smitten hearts and the graves of her unknown dead.... If I can but call up the spirit of this desolated and suffering land, and bid it speak to your hearts, I know that I shall not fail to have attentive hearers, and that my words will not be spoken in vain.”

Witherspoon encouraged the young graduates “to embalm in literature, and thus preserve in fragrant memory at least that peculiar type of civilization which has been the ornament of the South, but which is not to pass away.” Further, the record of slavery would have to be set straight:

[Enemies of the South had tried] ... to represent the influence of slavery as having been degrading both to master and to slave; to picture Southern society as corrupt and debased through the presence and contact of this vile enormity; to represent Southern people as imbruted in their instincts, rendered cruel, mercenary and vindictive by their traffic in human flesh.... It must be ours to give the world a true portraiture of those brighter days ... when our very slave states were happier than those who came to liberate them – far happier than they will ever be in that freedom, falsely so-called, into which they have been introduced.”^{iv}

To portray the four-year battle as simply over slavery, Witherspoon believed, was to foster “an entire misconception.” It was the “educated men of the South” who had to put a stop to the “determined effort being made to write a history of this revolution as a fractious and causeless conspiracy against a peaceful government.”

Witherspoon told students they must replace old school books with new ones, to aid in the “preparation of an educational literature for the youth of the South.

All the text books in prominent use among us have been compiled by Northern scholars and issued by Northern publishers” and in these books was a “spirit of fanaticism” that threatened “to poison the minds of the people with false views of the struggle that has closed.... We must have an educational literature of our own, or we have no security for the future against a thralldom far worse than that of the bayonet.”

From Witherspoon’s emotional address, the University of Mississippi, barely twenty years old, was carrying out the mission its earliest supporters had planned and hoped for, to transmit the state’s customs, values, history, and habits – Mississippi’s culture – across generations.

A Decade later, The Battle at Oxford

“I considered myself an active duty soldier. I was at war, and everything I did I considered an act of war.” – James Meredith.

James A. Doyle, in creating his biography of James Meredith, was clearly enamored by this Mississippi black hero, finding “a character so colorful and complex,” he could only have sprung from Mississippi’s rich soil:

He seemed to dwell inside a myth of his own design, a realm often remote and impenetrable to other people. He was an obscure loner who before his thirtieth birthday would engineer a stunning historical coup by mobilizing thousands of people to do his will, including the president and the Supreme Court of the United States. He was a supremely logical man whose reasoning would be misunderstood by practically everyone, a brilliant strategist who would be dismissed by many as being crazy. His sudden impact on Mississippi history would pack the explosive power of a social and political bombshell.^v

Born on a small farm in 1933 near Kosciusko in Attala County east of Holmes County (near the same birthplace as Oprah Winfrey), James Meredith was the seventh of Cap Meredith’s 13 children, and the first of seven by Cap’s second wife, Roxie. His family was poor but self-sufficient.”

Early in life, Meredith knew that he wanted a better education and so he moved to St. Petersburg, Florida to live with an aunt until his high school graduation in 1951. Meredith knew attacking Jim Crow meant self-improvement, and that it would require money and education to do this. He joined the U. S. Air Force directly out of high school in 1951, ensuring he would get the needed education.

Meredith was among the first wave of black soldiers serving the integrated U.S. armed forces, enlisting just three years after Harry Truman’s historic 1948 desegregation order. Doyle learned Meredith appeared before a military promotion board in 1954, during a nine-month hitch, that would eventually help him to evolve his role in the civil rights movement:

Rather than asking him about his job responsibilities, the colonels asked him his opinion of the Supreme Court decision ordering the desegregation of public schools in the United States. He told them in no uncertain terms of his support, and after they promoted him to staff sergeant, the colonels told him they were with him in the struggle but ‘the outcome will depend on you.’ From then on Meredith considered the statement a personal badge of responsibility.^{vi}

Meredith had routinely taken classes at nearby schools while in the military service, then upon leaving the Air Force he entered all-black Jackson State College. Because he believed that before he could engage in business at the level he desired, the system would first have to be broken, he set out on this goal by helping to form a small secret society of campus intellectuals called the Mississippi Improvement Association of Students, or MIAS.

“Their weapon was the mimeograph machine, and their ammunition was leaflets announcing they were going to break the system of white supremacy.”^{vii}

Meredith’s decision to seek admission to the all-white University of Mississippi reflected “a strategy to attack a system of segregation that limited the economic opportunities open to blacks,” Doyle wrote.

Two months after Meredith’s explosive admission and enrollment, Aaron Henry called to see how things were going. Meredith told the civil rights leader that he was doing relatively well but was terribly lonely and spent his weekends in Memphis or Jackson. “He asked me to come visit him, so I alerted the marshals on campus and paid him a call. We talked a few hours, and he told me he was wrapped up in writing an article for *Look* magazine . . . mostly I listened.”^{viii}

Aaron Henry had seen Meredith as an unusual person to stand up under such these types of immense pressures, facing them nearly every day on campus. “He has some peculiar ideas, but that was just the way God made him. He always felt that he was right and seldom thought anyone else was. This characteristic is not an asset under normal circumstances, but I believe it helped him accomplish what he did.”

Once Meredith was actually on campus and enrolled in classes, most Ole Miss students and most administrators treated him horribly; still, several faculty members and a handful of students were sympathetic. Incidents ranged from throwing food at him when he tried to eat meals in the cafeteria, to making threats on his life.

Like other Mississippi citizens, those who spoke out against the racist behavior were punished – from fistfights to shunning or even being encouraged to leave school.

David Molpus, the son of Belzoni Baptist minister, Chester Molpus, was already affected by such events in his early life when family friend, Rev. George Lee, was killed because of his voter registration efforts.

Over the next few years Rev. Molpus spoke out on racism. Hate calls became frequent and the minister found it necessary to check for bombs before turning on his car. He was finally forced to leave the Belzoni church and move his family to Kentucky.^{ix}

Young David Molpus thought that by returning to Mississippi and attending Ole Miss he could help bring change to the school. After joining the fraternity, he was angered by an article in the campus newspaper criticizing the school’s law dean.

“Why must Ole Miss follow in the manner prescribed by Ross Barnett?” he wrote to the school paper. His letter did not go well with the fraternity officers, who told Molpus he was bringing disrepute on the fraternity and could either change or keep his mouth shut.

After further altercations at Ole Miss involving free speech, Molpus left the University of Mississippi and later became a senior correspondent at National Public Radio for 28 years.

THROUGHOUT THE SOUTH, these years were times of hope for many southern blacks, as the civil rights movement progressed. When the Little Rock, Arkansas schools opened in 1959, desegregation was a fact. In North Carolina after sit-ins in 1960 at lunch counters, drugstores and restaurants, blacks could eat next to whites. In the same year, school desegregation took place in New Orleans; in 1961, two students were quietly admitted to the University of Georgia.

But in Mississippi, the murders, lynching, beatings and disappearances continued and schools remained segregated. Myrlie Evers later wrote:

The telephone would ring, and Medgar would be off on a dangerous trip.... I waited in silent terror that this time, or the next, he would not return.... A map of Mississippi was a reminder not of geography, but of atrocities, of rivers that hid broken bodies, of towns and cities ruled by the enemy. No spot was safe; no road without its traps, and Medgar Evers was a constantly moving target. I remember the years by the names of the victims.

Nineteen fifty-six was Edward Duckworth, shot to death by a white man who claimed self-defense. It was Milton Russell burned to death in his home in Bloody Belzoni, no one arrested.

Nineteen fifty-seven was Charles Brown, shot to death by a white man near Yazoo City. Nineteen fifty-eight was George Love, killed by a twenty-five man posse. No arrests.

It was Woodrow Wilson Daniels, who died of a brain injury nine days after a beating by a white sheriff; the sheriff tried and acquitted of manslaughter. Nineteen fifty-nine was Jonas Causey, killed in Clarksdale, with fifteen policemen accused of the crime. No arrests. It was William Roy Prather, fifteen years old, killed in what whites called a 'Halloween prank.'^x

There were so many others senselessly killed around Mississippi – most already forgotten.^{xi} Twenty-three-year-old Mack Charles Parker, a black truck driver from Lumberton, was accused of raping a white woman (his long time girlfriend). Witnesses had seen the couple together in the past, but on April 25, 1959, Parker was taken and dragged by a lynch mob from the jail in the rural logging town of Poplarville and shot to death on a river bridge north of Bogalusa, Louisiana three days before his scheduled trial date.

Believed to be in the lynch mob were a former deputy, a Baptist preacher, and the jailer. The local prosecutor refused to press charges and no one was ever indicted. An FBI investigation took place only because “moderate” Governor J. P. Coleman called for it, after Parker’s body washed ashore several weeks later.^{xii}

Clyde Kennard of Hattiesburg was arrested September 15, 1959, for illegal possession of liquor and speeding. This happened shortly after Kennard was rejected the second time for admission to Mississippi Southern College, now the University of Southern Mississippi.

While Sovereignty Commission records show authorities once considered placing dynamite in his car (and a Hattiesburg lawyer offering to run him out of the country), the state finally succeeded in its quest to punish the poultry farmer and U. S. Army veteran when thirteen months later, on November 21, 1960, Kennard was convicted on charges of stealing chicken feed. He was sentenced to Parchman penitentiary for the maximum penalty of seven years.^{xiii}

Medgar Evers heard of the verdict and told a reporter Kennard's conviction was "a mockery of justice" for which Evers was arrested, charged with contempt and sentenced to thirty days in jail. The Supreme Court later overturned the conviction.

Kennard was literally beaten and worked to death at Parchman and after becoming seriously ill, he was diagnosed with cancer by the University of Mississippi Hospital. Returned to Parchman, Kennard was dragged out to work in the fields each day despite his growing weakness.

Prison authorities canceled his appointment for a medical checkup and he was not allowed to see his lawyer, Jess Brown. The Jackson attorney asked to receive Kennard's medical reports but never got them.^{xiv}

Tougaloo students mobilized to try and free Kennard, a friend of one of their instructors. The story was picked up nationally as Dick Gregory and Dr. Martin Luther King demanded Kennard's release.

Finally, in 1963, Governor Barnett ordered Kennard's release, concerned over potential bad publicity for the state if Kennard died at Parchman. Kennard underwent surgery in Chicago and soon died at Billings Hospital, shortly after he was paroled.

Was it an administrative oversight? Or was it deliberate negligence because of his connection with school integration? These questions, asked by Kennard's attorney, were never answered. "No one can say for sure. You have to draw your own conclusions," Jess Brown said.^{xv} Clyde Kennard died at the age of thirty-six on July 4, 1963.

ONE MONTH AFTER Kennard's initial arrest, in October 1959, Hattie Thomas and Luther Jackson, a friend from out of town, were sitting in a parked car in Philadelphia, Mississippi when a patrol car drove up and a policeman ordered the two to get out. With his gun drawn, the officer pushed Jackson around the car and shot him twice as Jackson tried to comply. Luther Jackson lay dead in a ditch by the time Hattie Thomas reached him.

Rainey argued that Jackson was drunk and had lurched at him violently. No other witness would corroborate Rainey's testimony, "none would dare contradict it. Once the future sheriff was cleared of wrongdoing in the shooting, he freely embroidered on the incident, feeding his own legend, saying that he had killed Jackson only as a desperate last effort to save his own life, that the 'Chicago nigger' had him down on the ground and was choking him."^{xvi}

Frances Culbertson, a black woman who witnessed Rainey kill Jackson, asked Sheriff Hop Barnett how he could let Rainey kill "a good man like this." But several weeks later, Culbertson was arrested and roughed up by Rainey.

The jury rendered a verdict of justifiable homicide to the officer, Lawrence Rainey. Evers demanded an investigation and U. S. Attorney General William P. Rogers promised the matter would receive careful consideration but a month later, the Justice Department concluded Rainey had not violated a federal statute and there was no basis for action.^{xvii}

Rainey was later elected Sheriff of Neshoba County. There were rumors of other blacks murdered by Rainey, known to be hard on blacks, including the "justifiable homicide" of a twenty-seven-year-old epileptic who had presumably gone on a rampage.

As the murders continued, Evers was called in to investigate so many of them. For him, the civil rights leader knew it was simply a matter of time. Evers knew that he was being followed – his wife and others later confirmed his suspicions. Myrlie Evers wrote how every few days her husband would do or say something sounding as if he knew his death was imminent.

They had talked about the possibility. It might be discussion of a lapsed insurance policy, where to “safely” sit in the living room or, “If I go tonight, if I go next week, if I go next year, I feel I’m ready to go.” It was as though he had made up his mind, she later wrote.^{xviii}

By the spring of 1963 and on into the summer, violence against Mississippi blacks and civil rights workers was becoming more frequent and severe, according to Henry. “The Justice Department was continuing its work of handling court suits and legal matters, but this was not deterring the acts of wanton brutality against Negroes. We understood the position of the government and the difficulty federal authorities had in finding a legitimate entry into problems of intimidation, but we made constant appeals with the hope that they could find some ways to help.”^{xix}

U. S. Congressman Charles Diggs of Michigan, an old ally, agreed to come to Mississippi for an informal investigation, to view personally the situation and then report back to the President. Diggs spoke at a mass meeting in Clarksdale on April 11 and then returned to Aaron Henry’s home to spend the night.

On Diggs’ second day, following a tour of the region, the Henry home was bombed, causing the entire front part of the house to erupt into flames. Both men fought the flames until the fire department arrived twenty minutes later.

Henry was able to take his daughter safely from their home and then went back in to help his wife, Noelle and Diggs escape. A second bomb was found attached to Henry’s car. The fire department arrived twenty-five minutes after receiving the call; Henry and Diggs had already extinguished it. Later Congressman Diggs asked the House Judiciary Committee to hold a series of hearings in the Clarksdale area, after seeing first-hand evidence of abuses against blacks who tried to exercise their constitutional rights.

“He stated that the committee should have a firsthand look at the situation which would provide a psychological impact that would be lost in a hearing room in Washington.”^{xx}

In May, the front of Henry’s drugstore was nearly blasted away. He phoned the sheriff who investigated and suggested the explosion was caused by a bolt of lightning.” The FBI filed its customary preliminary report on the findings with Clarksdale police. Henry never saw the report, but heard it stated the explosion also was the result of a “bolt of lightning.” To his knowledge, a final FBI report was never made. A short time after the store was bombed, Henry’s front window of his home was shot out. Again, this incident was investigated but no arrests were made.

In Holmes County, around the same time of Henry’s problems, Hartman Turnbow, a county voter registration leader, was home sleeping when firebombs began exploding in the front of his house and bullets tore through several windows. When SNCC organizer Bob Moses arrived to investigate, Moses was arrested and charged with impeding the official investigation. Officers also charged five civil rights leaders, including Turnbow and Moses, with setting fire to the house to create racial agitation.

Evers’ life remembered

“He was sort of a lone wolf who traveled lonely and mighty dangerous trails.... He was simply and in every sense of the word, a hell of a brave pioneer deep in the wilderness.” – *John Salter, Tougaloo College sociologist and close friend of Medgar Evers*

On the night of June 11, 1963, George Owens and John X stood outdoors and looked at each other in the dark Mississippi night. Salter would later write:

Everything in my mind seemed to come to a stop and it felt, there for a brief moment that out and beyond from where we stood stretched nothing at all – that everything was a dream. I looked around. There was a little mist rising from the ground. The stars seemed cold. Dogs were barking in the distance. I looked at George Owens again and asked him to repeat what he had said.... He told me all that he knew. Medgar had been shot in front of his home moments after he had gotten out of his car. He was badly wounded and the man who had tried to call me, whoever he was, knew only the Medgar was not expected to live.^{xxi}

President Kennedy was scheduled to give an historic speech nationwide on civil rights, endorsing for the first time federal civil rights legislation. Medgar Evers had reminded his wife to watch Kennedy on television, since he would be attending a public meeting at New Jerusalem Baptist Church and then continue going over testimony with Aaron Henry.

Both men were supposed to testify before the House Judiciary Committee in Washington the next day on civil rights. Henry recalled the two worked until about eleven-thirty before Henry departed:

The ride to the airport was “like a hundred others,” as the two men talked, having no understanding that this would be their last ride together. Evers left Henry at the airport. Plans were to fly separately and then meet in Washington that afternoon.

Shortly after midnight on June 12, Medgar Evers stepped out of his car in the driveway of his home on Guynes Street. A white man, hidden in a honeysuckle thicket 150 yards away, fixed him in the crosshairs of his high-powered rifle and fired one bullet, splattering his life and blood on the concrete driveway.^{xxii}

Evers was shot in the back, the slug hitting just below the shoulder blade and killing him as he got out of his car with a handful of t-shirts that read "Jim Crow Must Go." Myrlie Evers opened the door of their home to see her husband face down in blood, crawling toward the house. "The children ran out and were shouting, 'Daddy, get up!'"

The young father and civil rights leader staggered to his feet and groped toward the kitchen door before collapsing in a pool of blood. “His crisp, white shirt was pierced with a single bullet.”^{xxiii}

Evers “said nothing until neighbors and police hoisted him onto a mattress and into a station wagon. Neighbors rushed him to the hospital, but he died en route from loss of blood and internal injuries – ‘Sit me up!’ he ordered sharply, then, ‘Turn me loose!’ These were the last words of Medgar Evers, who was pronounced dead an hour later.”^{xxiv}

His own doctor could not treat him at the hospital because his doctor was black... That night, Kennedy, unknowing of the murder, spoke to the nation over change so desperately needed:

We preach freedom around the world, and we mean it. And we cherish our freedom here at home. But are we to say to the world – and much more importantly, to each other – that this is the land of the free, except for Negroes, that we have no second-class citizens, except Negroes, that we have no class or caste system, no ghettos, no master race, except with respect to Negroes? Now the time has come for this nation to fulfill its promise. We face, therefore, a moral crisis as a country and a people. A great change is at hand, and our task, our obligation, is to make that revolution, that change, peaceful and constructive for all.^{xxv}

The shooter had walked to a thick clump of honeysuckle 150 feet from the home that evening and lain down behind a sweet gum tree, with his high-powered Enfield rifle. “And just like Myrlie, Darrell, Rena, and Van, he waited for Medgar Evers to come home,” his brother Charles Evers later said.^{xxvi}

Later police recovered the rifle and identified fingerprints belonging to a Citizens Council member from Greenwood, Byron de la Beckwith, who was soon arrested and charged with Evers’ murder.^{xxvii}

His car, a white Valiant with a trailer hitch and a short-wave radio antenna, was easy to spot. Beckwith had parked it in the Joe’s Drive-In lot, facing the Evers’ home at 2332 Guynes.

By 1955, Evers had been the youngest man named on a nine-man "Death List" that was freely circulated in Mississippi. When the Rev. George T. Lee was shot-gunned to death in Belzoni after refusing to take his name off a voter registration list, the death list was reduced to eight. “Five others were erased as one by one, they were chased out of the state. By 1963, Evers had moved up to No. 1, and questions about a conspiracy played a role in the later decision to reopen the case.”^{xxviii}

In the weeks and days before his death, as Evers accommodated a visit from the national NAACP executive staff, “Fatigue had ... set in, and threats against his life were increasing. After someone threw a Molotov cocktail onto his carport the night after the Woolworth’s sit-in, Evers began to adopt more elaborate security precautions, and he talked with Myrlie about the likelihood that his days were numbered.”^{xxix}

The night of his murder, Aaron Henry recalled, “I left my car at the church and Medgar drove me to the airport.... Medgar said unidentified cars were following him constantly. The telephone harassment was worse than ever before, and his house had been bombed two weeks earlier, although there was no serious damage. He told me that he had alerted the FBI to all of this, but that he had not taken any new security precautions.... He was worried about his wife and three children.”

"I'm looking to be shot," Evers had told another friend, "any time I step out of my car." When he dropped a friend off after a meeting on Tuesday, June 11, Evers confided, "Everywhere I go, somebody has been following me."^{xxx}

At the breakfast table on the morning before his death, Evers' wife remembered that "He turned and looked pleadingly at me, his shoulders slumped, his face a mirror of conflicting emotions. 'Myrlie, I don't know what to do. I'm so tired I can't go on, but I can't stop either.'"^{xxxii}

Afterwards

Aaron Henry did not know what happened to his friend until he heard the news on television the next morning. His despair and that of others would be compounded at the death of President John Kennedy five months later, and then twice again, five years later when Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed, and soon after, Sen. Robert Kennedy. "My feeling was one of emptiness and helpless anguish, of absolute and total loss," Henry wrote.^{xxxiii}

The day after Evers' assassination, it appeared the NAACP leader's death would set off direct action in Jackson. Hundreds of angry blacks poured into the streets and for the first time, black ministers were marching along with large groups of newly involved poor blacks.

The Justice Department was notified that leading black ministers were being told to stop preaching nonviolence, as Jackson police were using violence to stop demonstrations. Salter and others had gathered about two hundred people, ready to go out onto Lynch Street – half Tougaloo students and Jackson youth, and half of whom were adults. "Outside, the police were much thicker than anyone had ever seen them. People were gathering on the sidewalks and lawns along Lynch Street."^{xxxiii}

In ranks of two and three and singing freedom songs, the mass march moved out onto the sidewalk, turned left down Lynch Street in the general direction of the downtown area. Immediately a number of Jackson police cars rush down from ... where they had been assembled.... All of the police cars passed the marchers, who were still on the sidewalk, and parked about three blocks below the point that the demonstrators now were.... The march stopped a few feet from the blue-helmeted and brown-helmeted ranks. For a moment there was silence. Then the lawmen spread out so as to partially surround the long line of demonstrators. Then the police began to push and shove and club the people toward the garbage trucks that had just arrived and parked. And a great roar now went up from the hundreds and hundreds of people watching, and the roar became the chant of 'Freedom! Freedom! We want Freedom!'^{xxxiv}

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Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Medgar W. Evers:
Reflection And Appreciation

Comments by Hunter Bear: January 15 2004.

[Hunter Gray/Dr. John R Salter, Jr.]

I knew Martin King – not deeply and well – but consistently. I called him on the night of June 13, 1963 from Jackson – two days after Medgar Evers was shot and killed. Our rapidly growing

protest demonstrations were being bloodily suppressed. I asked Dr King to come to Jackson for Medgar's funeral on June 15. He readily agreed to do so. We picked him up and several key staff of his – Ralph Abernathy, Wyatt Walker and others – at the police-drenched Jackson airport. It was already very hot and the temperature was to go, that day, to 102 super-humid degrees. Martin King and Dr Abernathy rode in my car – along with Bill Kunstler – and the others were brought by Ed King. We had a very grudging police escort from the city's all-White police department. The Jackson setting could not have been more lethally dangerous for all of us – but Dr. King visited easily and casually with me, and I with him, as we traveled the very dangerous several miles to the Negro Masonic Temple on Lynch Street. The funeral was huge – several thousand people, inside and out -- and, following the funeral, six thousand of us marched the two miles or so from the Temple to the Collins Funeral Home on Farish Street. [It was the first "legal" civil rights demonstration in Mississippi's hate-filled, sanguinary history.] Then, there was a second massive demonstration -- which is discussed in my following post on Medgar Evers.

I knew Medgar Wiley Evers deeply and well.

(This extensive document focuses heavily and in considerable detail on my personal and direct recollections of Medgar W. Evers. It also deals with the epochal Jackson Movement of 1961-1963. Written by me [Hunter Gray] on September 27 1966 -- little more than three years after Medgar's death in 1963 -- to Ms. Polly Greenberg, a writer from New York City – my recollections were fresh, sharp and vivid. [And they certainly still are -- etched forever in my psyche.]

To Ms. Polly Greenberg, New York: 9/27/66

I knew Medgar Evers very well from 1961 to his death. I was the Advisor to the Jackson Youth Council of the NAACP, a member of the board of directors of the Mississippi NAACP, and chairman of the strategy committee of the Jackson Movement. I worked with Medgar closely. And I always had tremendous respect for him. . .

Medgar was a very stable, very cool person. The only time that I ever saw him break down came in the Fall of 1961, at an evening dinner session of the annual convention of the Mississippi NAACP -- in the Masonic Temple on Lynch Street. The police were parked outside and, inside, the delegates from the scattered, and generally moribund NAACP units around the state, had finished giving their reports. Medgar got up and began to speak on the matter of Clyde Kennard of Forrest County who, a year or so before, had been spirited off to the penitentiary on the trumped-up charge of receiving stolen chicken-feed -- all of this stemming from Kennard's several attempts to enter all-white Mississippi Southern at Hattiesburg. As Medgar talked on about the Kennard case, his voice shook and, in what was obviously deep sorrow and frustration,

he wept openly. With one accord -- and with many others weeping by this time -- all arose and began singing "We Are Climbing Jacob's Ladder." When the song was over, Medgar continued, outwardly calm.

The Evers family lived under constant threat of violence. I can recall that, in the days just preceding the Meredith-Oxford crisis in September, 1962 -- all sorts of legal maneuvers were going on in the Federal district and Fifth Circuit courts -- my wife and I went one Saturday night to the Evers home. We knew Medgar was probably in New Orleans where the Fifth Circuit was then grinding away, and we thought we should see his wife, Myrlie. We parked, went to the door, and knocked. Medgar's police dog was barking in the back yard (fenced up). There was no answer to our knock and I knocked again. Then the door opened, only a crack, and I could see a gun. I called my name and Medgar opened the door, instantly apologetic. He had come to Jackson for the weekend. Inside the Evers home, furniture was piled in front of all of the windows. At least a half dozen firearms were in the living room and kitchen. The children were in bed and Medgar and his wife and Eldri and I visited for a good while. The barricaded nature of the Evers home was not uncommon for a civil rights person in Mississippi; what was uncommon was the fact that both Medgar and his wife were mighty calm. It was a very pleasant visit -- unusually so considering the fact that, next perhaps to Meredith, no one was any more prime a target in the Deep South at that time than was Medgar.

I can recall one occasion that Medgar conceded fear -- at least as he recounted the experience to me. He had gotten a new Oldsmobile, but up in the northern part of the state it had broken down. The only place he could get it fixed was at the garage owned by the county president of the Citizens Council -- so the car was towed there. Apparently, the garage was, in the purest sense of the term, a cracker nest. The owner and his men recognized Medgar's name immediately, but began to work on the car. He didn't want to stay in the garage for the day that it would take to fix it, but on the other hand he was afraid to leave for fear they'd somehow sabotage the car. He wound up staying the whole day, right by his car while the mechanics worked on it. Many people came by to look at him, but he stuck it out until the car was fixed; then left just before sundown.

But he was cool: I recall leaving Greenwood with him one night at midnight -- and we left at 90 mph -- with Medgar casually talking about a rumor he'd heard to the effect that a segregationist killer outfit in Leflore Co. had installed infra-red lights on the cars, which could allow them to see the highway, but which couldn't be spotted by whoever they were following. By the time he finished discussing this, we were going about 100 mph! But he was driving easily and well and his talk was calm in tone, if not in content.

But Medgar did not take chances, and no one could seriously accuse him of consciously or unconsciously seeking martyrdom. In the spring of 1963, he and I and several members of the Jackson Youth Council began to try to pull together a little Movement in Canton -- the first efforts along those lines since the Citizens' Council had destroyed a tiny NAACP in Canton around 1955. Our first meetings, which had been preceded by promises from, say, 50 or so to attend, featured turnouts of around 5 and 6 people -- but the little group (we met in the Sunday School room of an old church) began to grow slowly. The whole town was filled with terror; Billy Noble was sheriff then -- I understand he's police chief now -- and there had been a number of killings of Negroes, none solved, in the fall of '62 and the winter of '62-'63. After we had had several meetings, cars of whites began to cruise around, up and down the streets, in front of the church when we were in there. Medgar always insisted on people not standing in the light; he, himself, stayed in the shadows -- took every safety precaution. He never left Canton at night unless I, or someone else, was in another car right behind him. He didn't want martyrdom; just wanted to keep on living and working.

No matter how discouraged he might feel, Medgar was always able to communicate -- or at least made a hell of an effort to communicate -- enthusiasm to those with whom he was working. In the early days of the Jackson Movement, our "mass" meetings were tiny affairs, yet Medgar always functioned as though the meetings were the last crucial ones before the Revolution broke in Mississippi: he met each person on an equal to equal basis, smiled, joked, gave them the recognition of human dignity that each human being warrants; by the time the meeting began even the little handful of faithful felt it was worth holding; never an orator, Medgar was a good firm speaker -- by the time the meeting was over, he'd given it all he had, and the handful went home determined to do what they could. Those early meetings in Canton were the most terror-stricken I'd ever seen -- but, even there, he communicated enthusiasm: talked about crops, then about voting.

But Medgar Evers could, privately, get discouraged. In his neighborhood, for example, lived many teachers. Most would scarcely talk to him -- they were scared to death to even see him. Many of the clergymen in Jackson were afraid to exchange words with him. One evening Medgar came out to our home at Tougaloo; he'd spent the day trying to draw some teachers into the NAACP. They had turned thumbs down on it; had even told him, in effect, that the state's Negro community would be better off without him. He had had it that day and, I recall, talked then -- as he always did when he got discouraged -- about giving up the NAACP field secretary job and getting into the Ole Miss law school in the fall. I think he would have ultimately gone to law school, and most likely at the University of Mississippi -- but it would probably have been many years before he would have stopped his field work. He'd get discouraged, privately -- never publicly, but a day or so later, he'd be back in form.

Medgar was a great friend of kids and, having been a football player at Alcorn, he maintained quite an interest in the sport. He used to play -- when he had some free time -- with the neighborhood kids. He was also an avid fisherman and did some hunting.

In the late fall of 1962, our Youth Council began the boycott of downtown Jackson, and we did a tremendous amount of grassroots organizing to support the boycott -- which was successful. As the boycott went on into the spring, we broadened it into an all-out desegregation campaign - picketing, sit-ins, and massive marches. This was in May and June, 1963. It was the first widespread grassroots challenge to the system in Mississippi -- the Jackson Movement -- and there was solid opposition from [Governor] Barnett right on down. Mass arrests and much brutality occurred each day; lawmen from all over the state poured into Jackson to join the several hundred Jackson regulars, the Jackson police auxiliary, state police, etc. Hoodlums from all over the state -- Klan-types, although the KKK as an organization was just formally beginning in Mississippi -- poured into Jackson. The National Office of the NAACP, which had reluctantly agreed to support our Jackson campaign, became frightened -- because of the vicious repression and because it was costing money -- and also the National Office was under heavy pressure from the Federal government to let Jackson cool off. A sharp split occurred on the strategy committee. Several of us, the youth leaders, myself, Ed King and a few others, wanted to continue, even intensify the mass demonstrations; others, such as the National Office people and conservative clergy wanted to shift everything into a voter registration campaign (meaningless then, under the circumstances.) There was very sharp internecine warfare between our militant group and the conservatives. Medgar was caught in the middle. As a staff employee of the National Office, he was under their direct control; as a Mississippian, he knew that only massive demonstrations could crack Jackson. (And we knew if we cracked Jackson, we had begun to crack the state.) The stakes were high and everyone -- our militant faction on the strategy committee, the conservative group, the segregationists, Federal government -- knew it.

The NAACP National Office began to cut off the bail bond money; and also packed the strategy committee with conservative clergy. It was a hell of a situation. Despite everything that I and Ed and the youth leaders could do, the National Office was choking the Jackson Movement to death. It waned almost into nothing in the second week in June.

I saw Medgar late one afternoon, Tuesday, June 11. He was dead tired and really discouraged -- sick at what was happening to the Jackson Movement, but too much a staff man to openly challenge it. (Back in January, 1963, he had openly challenged the National Office; told New York to speed up the Jackson school desegregation suit -- of which two of his own children were plaintiffs -- and hinted if they didn't, he might resign his job. The National Office had speeded it up -- a little.) But, in this situation, although he was with us intellectually and emotionally, he didn't really buck the National Office. We had a long talk and, despite the internal situation, an

extremely cordial one. But he was more disheartened than I had ever known him to be. Later that evening, we were all at a little mass meeting (the size of the meetings had grown as the Movement had grown, from a handful to 1,500 or 2,000 a night, but now, as the Movement waned, they were waning in size) and at this meeting it was announced by the National Office people that the focus of the Jackson Movement was now officially voter registration -- no more demonstrations. The boycott, out of which it had all grown, would continue -- but no more demonstrations. NAACP T-shirts were being sold. It was a sorry mess. Medgar had no enthusiasm at all; said virtually nothing at the meeting; looked, indeed, as though he was ready to die. A few hours later, he was shot to death in front of his home.

His death was the resurrection of the Jackson Movement. Within hours, we had organized huge demonstrations which poured out onto the streets; the National Office had no alternative, under the circumstances, but to let us go ahead. Police brutality and terror mounted steadily -- it was in a much grimmer dimension than it had ever been. About 6,500 people, from all over Mississippi -- from places in which no civil rights worker had ever set foot yet -- came into Jackson for Medgar's funeral. A number of nationally prominent people were there.

At the funeral, little was said about Medgar the man -- a lot was said about the glorious career of the NAACP. Most in attendance at the funeral marched the 3 miles or so from the Masonic Temple to Mrs. Harvey's funeral parlor (Collins Funeral Home) on N. Farish Street. This was the first "legal" mass civil rights-type march ever held in Mississippi's history -- and it was held only because we had let the power structure know we'd march anyway. (National Office had really been against it; two days or so after Medgar's death, the National Office was once again trying to stop the mass demonstrations). Once at the funeral home, the nationally prominent folk -- including the top NAACP leaders and others -- left the area.

The thousands of Negro Mississippians stayed there, in front of the funeral parlor into which Medgar had been taken following the funeral. Then we had the second huge demonstration of the day -- this one "illegal" -- several thousand of us pressing back down N. Farish Street toward Capitol Street. There must have been 2,000 law officers massed in and around the whole area -- and several hundred blocking N. Farish St. where it enters Capitol St. About 30 of us that the police recognized, including Ed King and myself, were arrested; the cops clubbed the others back down N. Farish Street, fired over their heads, shot out windows etc. Those of us who had been arrested were carried to the fairgrounds [the State Fairgrounds had been serving as a massive concentration camp.] John Doar of the Justice Dept., assisted by several National Office people, finally persuaded the remaining demonstrators to go home. That was the largest demonstration of an "illegal" nature that has ever occurred in Mississippi; it lasted about 2 hours.

Shortly after that, the Kennedys got on the phone, the National Office cut off the bail bond, Ed King and I were nearly killed in a rigged auto wreck and my car in which we were riding was completely destroyed. [We were hospitalized.] Ten days after Medgar's death, the Jackson Movement was essentially dead -- sold out. [The boycott lived on.]

This is an extremely bitter story and I have not done it justice, as far as detail, in this letter. I have written a book about it which will be published sometime. [Note: March 3, 2001: The book was finally published: John R. Salter, Jr., Jackson: Mississippi: An American Chronicle of Struggle and Schism, 1979 -- and a slightly expanded Krieger Publishing paperback edition, 1987. In addition, I've done a number of oral histories on the Jackson situation and much more.]

When I first came into Mississippi, in 1961, it was a lonely place for a civil rights worker -- and it must have been even lonelier back in 1954 when Medgar went to work full-time for the NAACP. No one really gave a damn about Mississippi -- it was the tail end of the world. In 1961 and 1962, there was only a handful of civil rights activists in the state. Medgar belonged to that early era.

He wasn't really an organizer; was sort of a lone wolf who traveled lonely and mighty dangerous trails. He kept the few dissidents that existed in the state together in little groups that did as much as they felt they could do; persuaded people to attach their names to pioneer civil rights lawsuits etc; investigated and tried to publicize the many atrocities which occurred each week. And, on orders from the National Office, he sold NAACP membership cards. Cliché it may be, but he was, simply and in every sense of the word, a hell of a brave pioneer deep in the wilderness. His death ended one era in Mississippi, and began another; he had hardly been buried in faraway Arlington cemetery when dozens, and then hundreds, of activists began to pour into Mississippi from all over. And then, thank God, the wilderness began to recede. I hope this has all been of some help. Give us a call, or drop us a line, if there is anything else you need -- or anything that needs elaboration. Keep the Ebony article as long as you wish; but please return it when you are finished. Again, good talking with you.

As Ever,

John R. Salter, Jr. [Hunter Gray] 9/27/66^{xxxv}

* * * * *

Salter returned to Evers' office finding Ruby Hurley of the NAACP and a minister "sitting at Medgar's desk, planning the details of the funeral that was going to be held on Saturday to encourage the greatest possible attendance." Then he was told the night march had been canceled by NAACP officials.^{xxxvi}

Both Salter and Ed King were blamed for "inciting a riot" by the NAACP's Gloster Current who called for their immediate expulsion from the strategy committee. Current cited

“evidence” he received from the Jackson police but he received no support on ousting Salter and King from committee members. Yet the NAACP decision to end mass demonstrations had still been made, Salter observed.^{xxxvii}

On Tuesday following the funeral, as Salter and King drove away from a downtown morning meeting, they noticed a police car two or three blocks behind them. From time to time, Salter looked in his rear-view mirror and finally could no longer see the police car.

“We had been followed constantly, for weeks, but somehow all of the attention given us by the police on Farish Street shortly before, and the fact that they followed us as we left the Farish street area to head back to the college, disturbed me very much. I drove well under the speed limit, traveling only about thirty miles an hour.”

Then in a split second, Salter saw what was taking place:

“Some yards ahead of us, lunging out of a side street to our left and past a stop sign, came a car driven by a white youth in such a fashion that another car coming down toward us in the other lane was forced ... into our lane, approaching us head on while the white youth quickly manipulated his car over to the side. I was throwing on my brakes and so, probably, was the other car – but it was too late. We hit head on.”^{xxxviii}

Both men, seriously injured, were taken to the hospital. As he was coming out of a fog, Salter asked who was driving the car that forced the other one into his lane. When he was given the driver’s name, Salter quickly remembered the youth’s father, a former public official, “was one of Jackson’s most prominent Citizens Council members.”^{xxxix}

Power of the Church

As a body, most white Mississippi churches stood in the way of integration; some believed that Evers’ assassination occurred because of his attempt to lead students in integrating white Jackson churches.^{xl} Within most white churches around the entire state, discussion of any civil rights event – the death of Medgar Evers included – was taboo.

On the Sunday after Evers’ death, one Tougaloo faculty member tried to point out some of the inaccuracies in newspaper reports of the civil rights leader’s assassination. The following Sunday, it was made clear that all members of the Sunday school class were not to say anything that might offend the basic beliefs of anyone else in the class.

Another professor, from Millsaps College, was the target of a move at Capital Street Methodist Church “reportedly underway to expel [him] from membership [after he] urged moderation on the race issue.”

At a third Jackson church, the minister “resigned in protest against the barring of Negroes.” The board of stewards, meanwhile, passed a resolution saying it wanted a “minister that will preach what the congregation wants to hear.”^{xli}

ON THE DAY following Evers' murder on the Ole Miss campus, Army personnel were evacuated at dawn – just one week after Meredith and a second black student, Cleve McDowell of Drew, had enrolled for the summer session without incident.

The decision to pull troops meant that twenty-one-year-old McDowell, accepted as the state's first black graduate student at a white university, would be left with no security once Meredith graduated and left campus. Meredith was so angered over the evacuation that he lashed out at the contingent's relocation to semi-permanent headquarters on federal government land about a mile south of Oxford. All of the troops would be gone from Oxford by July 24.

"Troops should not be necessary to ensure the safety of any citizen in this democratic nation," Meredith said, adding that a "serious conflict" existed between federal and state forces.^{xlii}

Days earlier, when McDowell had entered summer sessions at Ole Miss, Governor Barnett spoke on television to restate that Mississippi "would not guarantee the safety of black students," contending that it was the responsibility of the federal government.

The governor also repeated his adamant opposition to integration: "We will oppose, on all occasions and at every opportunity ... all dictatorial powers and police which seek to change our school system, our customs, our heritage, our way of life."^{xliii}

Barnett had decided earlier he would not oppose McDowell personally, as he had done with Meredith. But there were advance rumors that he might meet McDowell at Oxford and "try to talk him out of entering the university."

McDowell's entry to Ole Miss appeared easy at first, with no campus riots, but his world changed within five days after he started classes and Medgar Evers was killed. Evers had been a hero to McDowell when he was a student at Jackson State and an NAACP volunteer. Meredith, one of closest friends, was anguished over the murder as well and had always believed he would be the one to take a bullet, not Evers.

Meredith blamed the murder on Southern governors and their "defiant actions," as well as "blind courts" and "prejudiced juries" for creating the atmosphere that made such killings possible.^{xliv}

Even to the end, Ole Miss representatives harassed Meredith when two members of the board of trustees – appointed by Barnett – tried to prevent him from getting a diploma. They were outvoted, just barely.

A senior reporter in the South for the *New York Times* captured the significance of what Meredith had accomplished: "The violence in the last year had convinced many Mississippians that the strategy of resistance and defiance was harmful to the state's overall economic and social health.

"Mr. Meredith's continued presence at the university served as an irritating symbol of its futility." Ironically, Meredith and Barnett became fellow alumnae.

More than 20 percent of the faculty left Ole Miss after Meredith's achievement – about twice the normal turnover. One professor, Dr. Samuel F. Clark of the chemistry department, spoke of “serious loss of academic freedom to faculty and students” and the “breakdown of moral and professional responsibility on the part of the university's administrative officers.”

One professor left because of his family's mistreatment after he had invited Meredith over to his house for dinner on special occasions. One of the cruelest incidents occurred when his daughter was given a black doll with a card attached that read “Nigger Lover” during her school's Christmas party.

The school's law dean left the university, too. Robert Farley, who once encouraged Medgar Evers to enter the law school and who tried to help McDowell, was in trouble once again for standing up for another professor's right to speak out freely.^{slv}

As fall term began, Cleve McDowell appeared outwardly calm. He was a handsome young man, slim, with high cheekbones and arrow straight posture. While he had simply taken over Meredith's dorm room instead of moving into another dorm, all of the other students moved off the floor, leaving him isolated.

McDowell was subjected daily to verbal harassment as he walked across the campus, and there were times that he was chased on campus as well. Several times during his drive between Oxford and his home in Drew, he was chased in his car by students wielding guns.

Once he was on his own, without any guards present, it took just three weeks before Ole Miss kicked him out.

ⁱ William Doyle, "An American Insurrection," (New York: Anchor Books, 2001), Introduction.

ⁱⁱ Nadine Cohodas, "The Band Played Dixie," (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 5.

ⁱⁱⁱ Henry Chase, "In Their Footsteps," (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1994), 110. In the autumn of 1962 some 3,000 federal troops were on the Ole Miss campus to keep order as James Meredith broke the color barrier.

^{iv} *Ibid.*, 13.

^v [Doyle, 17-18.](#)

^{vi} [Ibid., 20.](#)

^{vii} *Ibid.* In a 2004 CNN interview, Meredith explained, "I was engaged in a war. I considered myself engaged in a war from Day One. And my objective was to force the federal government -- the Kennedy administration at that time -- into a position where they would have to use the United States military force to enforce my rights as a citizen"

^{viii} Henry/Curry, 137.

^{ix} Nadine Cohodas, "The Band Played Dixie," (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 129.

^x Myrlie Evers, 204.

^{xi} [Mississippi has never done a good job of tracking race-based murders just as earlier murders and lynching figures are highly debatable. It seems that information about civil rights murders has become even less important as the focus remains on reopening investigations on the deaths of Emmett Till and Schwerner, Goodman and Chaney. Some even suggest that "most of the murders" will have been resolved once those cases are closed. This simply is not true, and one of the purposes of this book is to try and interest families and friends of those murdered or who have "disappeared" to come forward and demand these cases be reopened.](#)

^{xii} Cagin and Dray, 37, 255.

^{xiii} [Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission file\(s\) SCR ID # 1-27-0-40-5-1-1. Other Kennard files include a 37-page report on Kennard SCR ID # 1-27-0-6-1-1-1; spying on Kennard by agencies SCR ID # 1-27-0-11-1-1-1; retired FBI agent report on Kennard SCR ID # 1-27-0-14-1-1-1; Gov. and Attorney General on Kennard SCR ID # 1-27-0-15-1-1-1; threat by lawyer SCR ID # 2-3-0-10-1-1-1; Kennard at Parchman SCR ID # 1-27-0-68-1-1-1. In one 1959 memorandum commission investigator Zack VanLandingham tells of a conversation he had with a Hattiesburg lawyer, Dudley Connor, about Kennard in the late 1950s. "If the Sovereignty Commission wanted that Negro out of the community and out of the state they would take care of the situation." VanLandingham quoted Connor as saying, "And when asked what he meant by that, Connor stated that Kennard's car could be hit by a train or he could have some accident on the highway and nobody would ever know the difference." In another memo, written by VanLandingham to Gov. J.P. Coleman in 1959, the investigator relates a conversation he had with John Reiter, a campus police officer. "Reiter had several weeks ago told me that when Kennard was attempting to enter Mississippi Southern College in December 1958 that he had been approached by individuals with possible plans to prevent Kennard's going through with his attempt," he wrote. "One of the plans was to put dynamite to the starter of Kennard's Mercury. Another plan was to have some liquor planted in Kennard's car and then he would be arrested."](#)

^{xiv} Myrlie Evers, 192. Also "Behind the Cotton Curtain."

^{xv} "Behind the Cotton Curtain," 10.

^{xvi} Cagin and Dray, 304-305.

^{xvii} Dittmer, 79. Citing Myrlie Evers, *For Us*, 183-84; Medgar Evers to William Rogers, October 29, 1959, NAACP papers.

^{xviii} *Ibid.* 297.

^{xix} Henry/Curry, 141.

^{xx} *Ibid.*, 143.

^{xxi} Salter, 185.

^{xxii} Rene D. Turner, "Reopening of case revives interest in Medgar Evers assassination; Mississippi decision sparks questions about mysteries surrounding death of civil rights hero," *Ebony*, May 1, 1991.

^{xxiii} Reed Massengill, "Portrait of a Racist," (New York: St. Martins Press, 1993), 2.

^{xxiv} Taylor Branch, "Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63," (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), 825.

^{xxv} *Ibid.*, 824.

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xxvi Charles Evers, "Have No Fear," (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), 128.

xxvii Dittmer, 166, citing several sources including "For Us the Living," by Myrlie Evers.

xxviii Alex Poinsett, Benjamin L. Hooks, Renee D. Turner, "Reopening of case revives interest in Medgar Evers assassination; Mississippi decision sparks questions about mysteries surrounding death of civil rights hero - includes commentary by NAACP Executive Director," *Ebony* magazine, May, 1991.

xxix Dittmer, 165.

xxx Henry/Curry, 147.

xxxi Myrlie Evers, 298.

xxxii Henry, 147-148.

xxxiii Salter, 188.

xxxiv Salter, 189.

xxxv [Salter] spoke at various places around Mississippi. "Sometimes, as with this visit to McComb, Eldri and Maria traveled with me [and with my revolver.] My precise departure and arrival times were always kept in an extremely small circle." Copies of this letter are held in Salter's collected papers at State Historical Society of Wisconsin and Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Salter adds that "Very curiously -- surprisingly -- this extensive personal reflection/appreciation with respect to Medgar W. Evers, a major civil rights figure in Mississippi and national martyr, has been ignored by most writers who have had access to it. One of those who did use it -- and quite effectively -- was the New York Times reporter, Adam Nossiter, in his good *Of Long Memory: Mississippi and the Murder of Medgar Evers*, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1994. I now make it quite public." (Used by permission of the author, John R. Salter, Jr. [Hunter Gray])

xxxvi Ibid., 191.

xxxvii Years later, Salter wrote of the animosity that existed between Evers, himself and other Mississippi activists and the national NAACP officers: "The Jackson Movement was launched -- and proceeded bravely -- in the face of massive opposition by the formal racist enemies. But there was also substantial subversion by a significant portion of the National Office of NAACP and very much from the Kennedy administration. In a large, civil rights retrospective at Tougaloo and Millsaps colleges in late October and early November, 1979, I publicly denounced that "subversion by the corporate liberals of New York and the self-styled "pragmatism" of those splendid scoundrels residing in Camelot on the Potomac." And I hold to every word of that to this very day." (from Salter's [aka Hunter Bear] website, "Organizer 14, "Medgar W. Evers -- and Today," 6/12/02.)

xxxviii Ibid., 232.

xxxix Ibid., 233.

xl Mike Mohr, filmed documentary, "A Southern Town."

xli "Behind the Cotton Curtain," 20.

xlii United Press International, "Meredith Hits Removal Of UM Troops," *The Clarion-Ledger*, June 13, 1963.

xliii Cohodas, 104. Cites United Press International, "Barnett Decides Against Turning Away Second Negro at Mississippi University," *The Edwardville Intelligencer*, June 5, 1963.

xliv Cohodas, 104-105.

xlv I was told by a University employee that the Law School at Ole Miss has a letter in its Cleve McDowell file containing a warm, positive letter of recommendation by Dean Farley to the Texas law school, regarding McDowell. When I asked to see the letter in the fall of 2004, for possible use in this book, I was told it did not exist. No attempt was made to search for the letter.