

Where Rebels Roost

Mississippi Civil Rights Revisited

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Foreword by Benjamin T. Greenberg

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PROLOGUE

After two days of exposure, the internal tissue of a lifeless body begins to decay, turning into gases and liquids. If exposed to water the process of decomposition occurs approximately four times faster.

So when they pulled the lifeless body of a young black teenager from the Tallahatchie River during the August heat back in 1955, only an initialed silver ring on his finger made identification possible.

Emmett Till had been stripped naked, pistol-whipped, shot through the head with a .45-caliber Colt automatic and barb-wired to a seventy-four-pound cotton gin fan before he was dumped into twenty feet of the muddy Tallahatchie River. Neither the killing nor the murder site generated much surprise. “That river’s loaded with niggers,” one old white man quipped to reporters.¹

Fourteen-year-old Till, once physically afflicted by polio, was kidnapped shortly after midnight on the twenty-fourth of August from his uncle’s home in the small cotton town of Money, Mississippi, “a dusty crossroads settlement too obscure to merit a turn-off sign on the main highway.”² He was driven away to a weathered plantation shed in neighboring Sunflower County, where at least two white men tortured and mutilated him. A witness heard his screams for hours until the two men finally put an end to Till’s short life.

What the young boy said to a white woman clerking at the small family grocery in Money will never be known. But Emmett Till’s death became a civil rights milestone, setting off a chain reaction that would forever change the way we think and talk about race in this country.³

The name of this tune is Mississippi Goddam

And I mean every word of it.

¹ David M. Oshinsky, “Worse Than Slavery: Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice,” (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 230.

² Cloyte Murdock Larsson, “Land of the Emmett Till Murder Revisited,” *Ebony* 41 (March 1986): 53–58.

³ Christopher Mettress, ed., “The Lynching of Emmett Till: a Documentary Narrative,” (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2002), xiii.

In the early morning hours of June 12, 1963, a courageous civil rights leader lay bleeding to death in the driveway to his home. A Ku Klux Klansman had shot Medgar Evers as he arrived home at 12:20 a.m. after a long night at work.

Evers had left his car and started for the door. His wife and children jumped up to meet him, as the sniper, crouching 150 feet away in a honeysuckle thicket, fired one shot from his Enfield .30'06 high velocity rifle, then dropped the weapon into a patch of weeds and ran away.

Evers was hit in his back, just below his shoulder blade; the bullet tore out the front of his chest and rippled on through the living room "to spend itself against the kitchen refrigerator."⁴ He tried to stagger to his feet and work his way toward the kitchen door, but collapsed instead. His wife ran out to him, held his head in her arms and cried.

His friends place Evers on a mattress and rushed him by car to the University Hospital, open to whites only. Evers was at first refused admission. When hospital officials realized who he was, they broke the hospital's color barrier for the first time in its history. "Turn me loose!" These were the last words of Medgar Evers; the kind and patient man beloved by many was pronounced dead one hour later.

*Alabama's gotten me so upset
Tennessee made me lose my rest
And everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam.⁵*

At least one person in Neshoba County knew where "the car" was located before the FBI found it. The burned-out blue station wagon that everyone in town was keeping their eyes out for was stuck in the muddy Bogue Chitto swamp. A grandmother said she saw it first and called the FBI. It surprised her that the agents were slow to arrive; it took them two hours before they responded.⁶

Two days earlier, on Sunday June 21, 1964, a dozen Klansmen, who had bombed an African American church, chased three young civil rights workers

⁴ Taylor Branch, "Parting the Waters," (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), 825.

⁵ Nina Simone, "Mississippi Goddam," (New York: RCA/BMG Heritage, 1963), www.mainstreammusic.com.

⁶ From a story told to the author by the grandson (who remains anonymous).

into the night before killing them. It took another forty-four days to find the young mens' bodies – buried fifteen feet beneath an earthen dam, covered by the red Mississippi clay.

On the night they were killed, the three men had been stopped by a sheriff's deputy and temporarily jailed. He later released them into a mob of Klan members who beat and shot them.

The State of Mississippi delayed filing criminal murder charges against any of the Klansmen involved until January 7, 2005 when they hauled in one old man – a Baptist “preacher” – who had avoided conviction for federal conspiracy charges in 1967. In that trial, a holdout juror said she “could never convict a preacher.”

IT WAS PROPHETIC that Nina Simone wrote her song about Mississippi after Medgar Evers was killed; it was helpful music to have around back then when the grim news kept coming out. What made Mississippi stand out in the first place? Was this state really so different from Alabama, Tennessee and the rest of this country as black people struggled to gain their rights? What can be learned?

Searching for answers requires looking back to this country's deepest roots, starting with the enslavement of kidnapped Africans; in many parts of the South, the Mississippi Delta especially, Americans are haunted with this heritage of human bondage. The historical review continues through the Revolutionary War into statehood and then the Civil War and Reconstruction (twice). When Mississippi rejoined the Union in 1870, following the Civil War, former slaves made up more than half of the state's population. During the next decade, Mississippi sent two black U.S. senators to Washington, D.C. and elected a number of black state officials, including a lieutenant governor.

Mississippi's black citizens were finally voting freely and in large numbers – whites were still elected to most state and local offices – as black men and women were finally savoring freedom of speech and movement, the right to a fair trial, education for their children, and all the other privileges and protections of American citizenship. When Reconstruction ended in 1877 and federal troops withdrew, the old ways returned. Only one problem stood in the way of whites denying African Americans the right to vote – the 15th Amendment. And so Mississippi wrote into its state constitution a number of voter restrictions

including a poll tax that voters had to pay for two years before the election, making it difficult if not impossible for most blacks to register and vote.

Besides adding a literacy test (with ridiculously impossible questions) and all-white primaries, Mississippi also adopted a "grandfather clause" that allowed registering anyone whose grandfather was qualified to vote before the Civil War – an obvious benefit only for white citizens. With these new barriers in place, Mississippi cut the percentage of black voting-age men registered to vote from over 90 percent during Reconstruction to less than 6 percent in 1892. In many counties, the black vote was entirely demolished. Most other Southern states copied Mississippi's model.

Where Rebels Roost moves into the years as lynching slowed in the rest of the country but increased in Mississippi, and then into times before World War I as collectives and labor unions were forming through the mid 1930s while the possibility of World War II loomed. After World War II, the story continues into the modern Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s – a period of history more familiar to many readers. The final chapters extend beyond the modern civil rights era, as this march for economic and social equality continues.

Most details, including important and entirely new facts put forward in *Where Rebels Roost*, were found in diaries, letters, notes and newspaper stories, recently opened state "spy" files, government agency reports, contemporary academic research, civil rights books, email messages, talking to civil rights leaders and to regular people who lived through and often played a role in some of Mississippi's most *Goddam* years. Accounts often vary, depending on who tells the story.

One major theme running through *Where Rebels Roost* – and this may be the most relevant in light of the present-day concern to maintain civil liberties in a post-9/11 world – is whether or not a free society should question the effect of permitting government to spy domestically on its citizens for rebellious, but not criminal or treasonous behavior, if there exists the potential to abuse such authority so as to punish, deter or cripple the efforts of citizens advocating to redress their grievances. Domestic terrorism did not start on September 11, 2001. Murder, subjugation, illegal treatment and unequal standards were the rule, not the exception, in Mississippi. *Where Rebels Roost* pays heed to this dramatic arena of horrible events and to the ferocious willingness of Mississippi government officials to add to the collective misery of its citizens.

MISSISSIPPI MAKES a good case study of siege mentality. It might be hard to imagine that for 18 years this *most southern state on earth*, Mississippi, funded its own spy agency that functioned as a secret police force. The Mississippi Sovereignty Commission, formed in 1956 by the state legislature, was actually one of two groups leading the state's official resistance to civil rights. The second group – the white Citizens' Councils – was a private organization founded two years earlier in response to *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. Both aided in maintaining Mississippi's "closed society" by interchanging information, laundering money, tipping off the Klan and FBI to activities of civil rights activists or doing anything to disrupt the plans and activities of those working on the side of civil rights.

Often working the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta, a part of Mississippi with a heritage of struggle too-often ignored in other accounts, government spies (some former FBI agents or other experienced law enforcement personnel and some veterans with multiple Purple Hearts from military days past, ⁷) gathered whatever data they could to harm black citizens and others who "agitated" for voting and civil rights. These agents worked under the direction of the state Sovereignty Commission.

The Commission was intended to prevent outsiders from changing Mississippi's Southern--segregationist--way of life. It was supposed to do this by publicizing how well segregation worked and by secretly keeping watch over those who wished to overturn the system. By the time it closed in 1973, the commission's investigators had amassed confidential files on 87,000 people, making it the largest state-level spying effort in U.S. history.⁸ It was evident more than passive "watching over" integrationists and other so-called "subversives" had taken place.

⁷ From Sovereignty Commission documents SCR ID # 99-117-0-1-1-1-1 and SCR ID # 8-20-1-1-1-1-1 located at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Edgar C. Fortenberry, an investigator for the Sovereignty Commission, was an FBI agent for 27 years. James M. Mohead had worked for police departments in Washington, D.C. and Clarksdale, Mississippi after being an Air Force investigator. C. Fulton Tutor had been sheriff of Pontotoc County and had a military record with combat medals, including a Purple Heart. Web address for the archives is <http://mdah.state.ms.us/arlib/contents/er/index.html>

⁸ Peter Maas, "The Secrets of Mississippi," *The New Republic* magazine online, Dec. 21, 1998.

Some journalists not so jokingly, referred to the Sovereignty Commission as the “Cotton” or “Magnolia” Gestapo, and for good reason: Too often school superintendents, teachers, college administrators, ministers, doctors, bankers, journalist and any others with information which could be used against civil rights advocates were vulnerable to the Commission’s pressures. Those who did “inform” were both white and black. Some were paid for their tips. Some were not. In turn the Commission was typically protective of white informants but not of blacks.⁹

The information received was passed on where ever it was needed – to town constables, police officers and highway patrol officers (some who belonged to the Klan¹⁰) or to bankers and businessmen, school board members, loan officers – Citizens Councils members who could use information to financially punish *errant* Mississippians and others.

The information kept flowing as the Sovereignty Commission used secrets gained in a variety of ways to harm the enemy – supporters of integration and voting rights for blacks.

There were journalists who took advantage of a preferred relationship with the Sovereignty Commission and Councils members, and were paid to publish slanted news and editorials at the Commission or Councils’ request,¹¹ a technique

⁹ In many Sovereignty Commission files, names of black informants are visible while names of white informants were blocked out. Examples include SCR ID # 1-0-0-21-1-1-1, , SCR ID # 9-34-0-1-1-1-1, SCR ID # 9-31-1-2-1-1-1, and SCR ID # 9-33-0-1-1-1-1. The identity of its most prolific black informant, however, was hidden in the documents and only revealed in court testimony of director Erle Johnston.

¹⁰ Jerry Mitchell, “66 Klan Murder Raising Questions,” The Clarion-Ledger, January 9, 2000. Mitchell writes: “On Aug. 20, 1964, Roy Moore, then special agent in charge of the FBI in Mississippi, wrote Gov. Paul Johnson, identifying 15 law enforcement officers as Klansmen, from constables to members of the Highway Patrol.”

¹¹ The idea of newspapers promoting the interests of plantation owners in Mississippi is not new. In the 1920’s at the same time planters were working to import foreign replacements for Blacks moving North, the National Rural Association, a planters organization, reported that, “After a conference with a number of thinkers of both races, we have decided to call a meeting at an early date in one of most convenient cities, calling only the leaders of the race, to arrange plans, draw up resolutions of request and advice to both races, and arrange to organize every county of the South under the guidance of Negro leaders of their respective counties, keeping the negroes properly informed along the right lines and asking justice and protection from the white people...The great daily papers and the many weekly papers have thrown open their columns to the negroes in this

borrowed from the FBI.¹² Very few Mississippi journalists were brave enough to report the whole truth rather than succumb to Commission or Council pressures.

Many good people lost their jobs along the way – their credibility, their businesses, bank loans, their insurance, their reputations or their self-respect; many were injured and even killed because of what they knew or what they wanted to do or had done, all of which contributed to Mississippi’s structural attack against the state’s best and brightest in their resistance to racism and segregation.

State government, at first using public funds, fed the Citizens Councils via the Sovereignty Commission, which sometimes laundered incoming public and private money to the Councils and their off-shoots.¹³

Some money came through private individual donations, and then from small town and city banks, the state’s real estate board, the state bar association, private medical groups, chambers of commerce and others.

Yet, most of the funding for Citizens Councils projects – and later for setting up segregated white academies – came from one resource outside of Mississippi, from the accounts and foundation of one white Northeastern millionaire with direct Nazi ties, a financier who was following his own white supremacist agenda.¹⁴

To even acknowledge Mississippi’s state-sanctioned racism would likely result in professional character assassination. A white history professor at the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss), Dr. James Silver, wrote about Mississippi’s *closed society* and eventually went publicly on record as a fierce opponent of racism and its forces in the Magnolia State. He would lose his job, years later.

From his arrival on campus in 1936, Silver began making speeches outside of the university. One particular speech in Clarksdale on wage and hour issues almost caused him unanticipated trouble – as would many of his future activities:

work of properly advising their people and giving them every consideration.” This untitled newspaper article dated May 24, 1923 was in a clippings file at the Clarksdale Public Library.

¹² Glick, 45.

¹³ William H. Tucker, “The Funding of Scientific Racism,” (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 67.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

I am sure I was extremely cautious in my remarks about federally imposed minimum wages, not popular in the Delta even though they didn't apply to agricultural labor. At the time, I was unaware that laborers in the...lumber mills were being paid as little as ten cents an hour and that often in company scrip. In any case, the next morning's Clarksdale paper vigorously condemned my talk as a communist. A couple of days later I opened a letter from Tom Gibson, a gloomy columnist for the local press, who announced quite simply that I would be fired at the end of the year. In fact, he affirmed to several members of the Board of Trustees his belief that I was a Red."¹⁵

As the Sovereignty Commission and Citizens Councils grew in strength, Silver was finally forced to leave the state in 1964 and teach elsewhere.¹⁶ There were so many others who were punished for trying to fix the system, trying to lift the siege: Dr. Horace Germany wrote of returning to his Northern Mississippi home in 1956. For five years, the white minister worked at starting a small Bible college, where black students would also learn to run a dairy and grow their own foods.

After graduation, they would help other African Americans throughout the South. As his operation strengthened, Germany was approached one day by members of the white Citizens Council of Senatobia and questioned for two hours.

Was he financed by the NAACP? "I told [those who asked] we had neither asked for nor received a cent from the NAACP. Then Tillman [head of Council] asked me about a check from a woman in California, and if that check hadn't come from an 'NAACP source.'"¹⁷ It was clear that Citizens Councils members had pried into Reverend Germany's savings and checking accounts. Several days

¹⁵ James W. Silver, "Running Scared: Silver in Mississippi," (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984), 20. Again in 1949-1950, when Silver was sending back commentaries from Britain "somewhat favorable to nationalized medicine and industry," the same charge [communism] was pressed in the Mississippi legislature.

¹⁶ James W. Silver, "Mississippi: The Closed Society," (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1964). Dr. Silver, who came to Mississippi in 1936, the same year as journalist Hodding Carter, Jr., was eventually forced to leave Ole Miss and ended up at Notre Dame University.

¹⁷ Dr. Horace Germany, "At Any Cost," (Anderson, Indiana: Warner Press, 2000), 137.

later, Germany was ambushed and beaten severely by Tillman and several Citizens Counselor/Klansmen; one witness timed the beating for 45 minutes but did nothing to stop it.

Germany's physician arranged for his hospitalization at St. Joseph's Hospital in Meridian, far away from his home, where the Sisters hid him until it was safe to go home: "[My doctor] knew the Klan would finish me off if they knew I was still alive." Germany finally moved his school to Texas, where it grew into a successful small college, surpassing all goals he had set for the Mississippi campus.¹⁸ Unknowingly, left behind were hundreds of Sovereignty Commission secret reports on his family, his profession and his private life.

IRONICALLY, FOR AN ESPIONAGE organization focused on secrecy, the Sovereignty Commission left massive footprints. Thanks to the American Civil Liberties Union and others, including activist Ken Lawrence most of the Commission's secret reports are now open to the public after a twenty-five year battle. (The controversial privacy stance of Dr. John Salter and Rev. Edwin King – both dedicated civil rights activists – delayed the opening for years; there was fear that some informants would be killed if their names were revealed to the public.)¹⁹

Some Sovereignty Commission representatives and others hid or threw away thousands reports, memoranda and communications, rather than turn over the now incriminating documents; it is probable that boxes of documents are still stowed away in private homes and garages, as well as government and FBI offices. Were some files moved to Yazoo City, the state's alternate administrative center?

Copies of many files should be a part of the late U. S. Senator James O. Eastland's archived (but inaccessible as late as 2005) papers, since Eastland was

¹⁸ Ibid., 137.

¹⁹ Dr. John Salter (Hunter Bear) was "one of a tiny handful of people who, under the secrecy order of Federal Judge Barbour as part of the ACLU case, was permitted to view as many of the Sov Comm files as I wished. That was in late February and early March 1985. I saw much and almost all of it struck me as being both poisonous and mostly prosaic. I did feel that much had been culled out at some previous point. When my own file was released, it was -- to me at least -- interesting. but nothing all that exciting. And the omissions were certainly very obvious to me." From an e-mail interview by the author with Hunter Bear in May of 2005.

frequently updated by Commission directors both at his own request and their initiative; he was a distant relative of the man who killed Megar Evers and there were rumors of his Klan interests.

Some believe the Commission's secret work continues through the state's secretive Bureau of Investigations or BIA since early Sovereignty Commission records show an alliance between investigators from both organizations and the Mississippi Highway Patrol as they formally shared information. An FBI file received through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) indicates this relationship exists and was initiated back in the 1940s.

Where Rebels Roost emphasizes many activities occurring in the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta, the remote Northwest quarter of the state, a portion of the larger Mississippi Delta. There is particular value to understanding Delta culture because of its major role in agricultural production, resulting in a way of life that reveals the daily terror and violence experienced by blacks that often has been "insultingly romanticized as paternalism."²⁰

As unsolved Delta crimes and murders against black Delta residents were examined, it was obvious that too many facts disappeared over time – if they were ever collected in the first place, making investigation difficult at the least.

Even when "official" records were available, they were often suspect because of the bias that has traditionally kept Mississippi so enclaved. This Resistance to openness continues. When Freedom of Information Act requests (FOIAs) were handed to police chiefs, sheriffs, university officials, FBI and court officials by this author and a lawyer, only the FBI seemed to take these requests seriously. The one other exception was the District Attorney of Leflore County who searched for and found a newspaper article that was very helpful.

Most FOIA recipients would not bother to search at all for requested records. The Dean of the University of Mississippi's Eastland School of Law when asked to see the school's coveted James O. Eastland archives asked if he could "just show the rejection letter written to the last person who asked for this information," and laughed. Later it came back that "people at the University of Mississippi were really angry" over this FOIA request.

Bettie Dahmer's father, Vernon Dahmer, was murdered outside of the Delta (1966 in Hattiesburg); she asserts the importance of tracking down records

²⁰ Clyde Woods, "Development Arrested," (London: Verso, 1998), 7.

from past civil rights events. "Some things have a way of getting lost if there's no permanent record," Dahmer told Nikki Davis Moute of *the Hattiesburg American*.²¹ "There are people who would like to forget what we went through. Some of them are alive today. They want to forget they held those views. It would have been so easy for people in power to stop the Klan then." Dahmer was ten years old when the Ku Klux Klan firebombed her family's Forrest County home, but remembers the event well.

Her story is among 4,000 firsthand accounts of the civil rights movement that in 2005 were recorded and contributed to the Voices of Civil Rights, for the U. S. Library of Congress. "I told my story because I want people to know and remember what black people actually went through in the South because it is not addressed in the history books," Dahmer said. "If there is not a record of what happened, then it will be forgotten."

New investigations must be opened or reopened for possibly dozens of unresolved Mississippi civil rights murders including the murders of Birdia Keglari of Charleston in Tallahatchie County, a long-time voting rights advocate killed in 1966, her son, James; Adelene Hamlet who was killed in the same "car accident" as Birdia; and Cleve McDowell, a state NAACP leader and civil rights attorney who was murdered in 1997 in Drew of Sunflower County – both counties are in the Delta. There are so many others.

While new investigations of "more famous" crimes take place throughout Mississippi, many lesser known Delta civil rights murders (except for the murder of Emmett Till) are rarely addressed if ever. Another "unmentionable" would be gay behavior practiced by blacks and whites in both segregated and "mixed" relationships (practiced not only by mixed-race partners but perhaps more interestingly by mixed-race *political* and *civil rights* partners that might surprise even the most sophisticated observers). This topic is also addressed in *Where Rebels Roost*.

THERE ARE MANY INTERESTING asides to the Mississippi civil rights story but perhaps none quite so compelling as this: Seven years before President John F. Kennedy was assassinated, Sen. Eastland had met with Guy Banister ("a controversial CIA operative" and retired FBI agent in charge of the Chicago

²¹ Nikki Davis Maute, "Civil Rights Stories Find Home," *Hattiesburg American*, Feb. 24, 2005.

bureau²² and later linked to Lee Harvey Oswald and Eastland through the senator's Senate Internal Security Subcommittee or SISS) at the senator's Delta home

The *New Orleans Times-Picayune* on March 23, 1956 reported that [Robert] Morrison [a former chief counsel for Sen. Joseph McCarthy] and Banister traveled to Greenwood, Mississippi, to confer personally with Senator Eastland for more than three hours. "Describing the conference as completely 'satisfactory,' Morrison said, 'Mr. Banister has complete liaison with the committee's staff which was the main object of our trip.'"²³

Banister, a "notorious political extremist" described as the impetus for James Garrison's 1967-1970 Kennedy assassination probe,²⁴ became a focus of the Sovereignty Commission when it was suggested Banister should be hired to set up an even tighter domestic spying system in Mississippi.

Another Eastland operative, private investigator John Sullivan, made this suggestion in March of 1965 as shown in Sovereignty Commission records.²⁵ Sullivan, also a former FBI agent and private investigator often did work for hire for the Sovereignty Commission, the white Citizens Councils, of which he was an active member, and for Eastland's Senate Internal Security Subcommittee (SISS), as had Banister.²⁶

When Sullivan died in the mid 1960s, Sovereignty Commission investigators tried to acquire his library and files, but most of his confidential files were either burned by his widow or they had been lent out, and she could not remember who had them.²⁷

Some twenty-nine years later, in separate testimony before the John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Review Board during a Dallas hearing on

²² "Banister, FBI Chief Since February, to Leave Post Nov. 30," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Nov 19, 1954, Part 2, Page 12.

²³ Citation for this newspaper article ("NOTP, March 23, 1956, p. 1") comes from the online Jerry P. Shinley Archive "Re: Jim Garrison and the SCEF Raids."

²⁴ William Davy, "Let Justice Be Done," (Jordan Publication, May 12, 1999), 1. On the weekend of the assassination, Banister pistol-whipped his employee Jack Martin, after Martin accused him of killing Kennedy. Martin eventually spoke to authorities.

²⁵ Sovereignty Commission documents SCR ID # 7-0-8-89-1-1-1 and SCR ID # 2-56-1-20-1-1-1.

²⁶ Sovereignty Commission documents SCR ID # 99-36-0-2-1-1-1 SCR ID # 1-16-1-21-1-1-1, SCR ID # 1-26-0-5-2-1-1, SCR ID # 2-2-0-19-1-1-1, SCR ID # 1-24-0-11-1-1-1

²⁷ Sovereignty Commission files, SCR ID # 99-48-0-278-1-1-1

November 18, 1994, the late Senator Eastland was directly implicated in the president's assassination by one of the author/theorists invited to testify. "Lee Harvey Oswald was quite possibly an agent of the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee and he was doing the bidding of [Sen. Thomas J.] Dodd and Eastland and Morrison)," John McLaughlin said.²⁸

Documentation that could support or even discredit such assertions²⁹ might be present in the Eastland archives at the University of Mississippi, but no objective scholar has been allowed to search these archives since the day they arrived in Oxford. Instead, they were "managed" for years by a former Eastland associate and devoté who followed the papers from Washington, D.C. to Mississippi.³⁰

Finally in 2005 a historian was hired to organize the archives but there would still be a waiting period before any of the files could be view. The plan was to release first press releases, according to the historian who admitted that many important files were probably missing (that the files looked "cleaned out.").

MISSISSIPPI REMAINS a culturally and geographically intriguing region with a long history of extremes of every kind – but particularly in the agricultural Delta, which retains its role as economic capital of Mississippi, dominating the state's politics for generations.³¹

Where Rebels Roost – Mississippi Civil Rights Revisited explores this culture that is broad and influential enough to have birthed the modern civil rights

²⁸ Online minutes of testimony before the Assassination Records Review Board, November 18, 1994. Dallas, Texas. Testimony of John McLaughlin aka John Bevilaqua, Harvard University graduate and systems analyst, also a Kennedy assassination theorist. McLaughlin was testifying why he needed to see documents from HUAC and SISS. He had also requested military records of Wycliff P. Draper, head of the Draper Committees and Pioneer Fund. Mississippi had been the benefactor of Draper money in its fight against the Civil Rights Act of 1965 and in funding of private white academies per Sovereignty Commission reports.

²⁹ Eastland's name has also been associated with the murder of civil rights leaders Medgar Evers, Dr. Martin Luther King, U. S. Senator Robert Kennedy and with the mass murder at a U. S. Army base located in Mississippi of potentially 1,000 black soldiers during World War II.

³⁰ The former Eastland aid has since retired.

³¹ This book focuses particularly on Sunflower, Bolivar, Coahoma, Tallahatchie, Washington, Yazoo, Leflore, Humphreys, Quitman, Holmes and Issaquena counties that comprise the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta. The entire Mississippi Delta, of course, includes many more states and counties.

movement, as well as music called the blues, playing a national tune on race relations with its neighbors throughout the Union.

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BOOK ONE

History to Learn From

One Yazoo-Mississippi Delta story is set on a typical hot, humid and dusty afternoon in 1943 when all McKinley Morganfield wanted was a three-cent raise. The little extra would take this Delta farm worker up to twenty-five cents an hour.

But his foreman “blew all to pieces” when Morganfield asked for the raise, causing the young black musician to muster his courage and quit his tractor driving job on the Stovall plantation near Clarksdale.

Within a week, the blues man known better as *Muddy Waters* got his draft notice: Delta draft boards excelled at exempting their best field workers and moving others to the top of their lists, particularly any laborers who agitated or tried to leave the Delta, bluesmen included.³²

³² By the 1950s & 1960s, Muddy Waters had over a dozen hits like *She Moves Me*, *Caledonia*, *Baby Please Don't Go*, *Mannish Boy*, *Hoochie Coochie Man*, *Just make Love To You*, *Rolling Stone* and *Got My Mojo Workin'*. The Delta bluesman soon took the role as the "Father of electric blues." Muddy Waters was born at Rolling Fork, on April 4, 1915 and he died in Westmont, Illinois on April 30, 1983. The Rolling Stones and other major rock groups have sung his songs. Winner of six Grammy awards and inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 1986, Muddy Waters was honored once more in 1994 when the U. S. Postal Service issued stamps commemorating eight "Legends of Blues and Jazz," including Muddy Waters and two other Mississippians, Howlin' Wolf and Robert Johnson. His story like so many other musicians and artists starts in Mississippi ... in the heart of the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta.

Chapter 1 From the Delta

IN THE SUMMER of 2003, a new magazine was launched in Cleveland, Mississippi, a small and comfortable college town representing the heart of Mississippi Delta ethos. The September issue of *Delta Magazine* featured a guest editorial penned by Wyatt Emmerich, a Greenwood, Mississippi native, and owner of Jackson-based Emmerich Newspapers. Reframing the social climate, which made possible the Mississippi Delta blues, Emmerich wrote:

[T]he delta attracted adventurous souls who would risk their very lives to make it rich. The risk was real. Yellow fever and malaria were rampant. But for those who survived, the money flowed like wine.... Stuck out in a cash-rich swamp, surrounded by death, Deltans took to making hay while the sun shined. They threw huge parties that lasted for days. The money was good and life was for the living.... Another critical factor, also molded by the soil, was race. African Americans were needed to pick cotton. The whites, from the very start, were a minority in the delta. This led to a cultural mingling between whites and blacks on a scale never really experienced by the rest of the country.... The ultimate manifestation of this cultural cauldron was the blues.... Somehow, there is something in the Delta that seeped out and spread through music, until it altered the very notes the entire world expects to hear in their songs. That's pretty amazing.³³

Early times in the Delta were amazing but the better Delta stories are not of moneyed “risk-taking” white planters and their lavish lives, but are accounts of courageous blacks who often fought the system, both winning and losing their dreams and ambitions – and too often, losing their families or their lives. From a cadre of these talented African Americans came the blues.³⁴ Whites simply contributed their own special horror in shaping the release of this creativity.

³³ Wyatt Emmerich, “Embrace the Uniqueness of the Delta,” *Delta Magazine*, September 2003, 96.

³⁴ Alan Lomax, “The Land Where the Blues Began,” (New York: The New Press, 1993), 64.