The Journal of Mississippi History

Volume LXXXVII Fall/Winter 2025 No. 3 and No. 4

CONTENTS

COVER IMAGE — Grave of James Lynch, Greenwood Cemetery, Jackson, Mississippi. Credit: Isabella Suell, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

The Journal of Mississippi History (ISSN 0022-2771) is published by the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 200 North St., Jackson, MS 39201, in cooperation with the Mississippi Historical Society as a benefit of Mississippi Historical Society membership. Annual memberships begin at $35. Back issues of the *Journal* sell for $7.50 and up through the Mississippi Museum Store; call 601-576-6921 to check availability. *The Journal of Mississippi History* is a juried journal. Each article is reviewed by a specialist scholar before publication. Periodicals paid at Jackson, Mississippi. Postmaster: Send address changes to the Mississippi Historical Society, P.O. Box 571, Jackson, MS 39205-0571. Email journal@mdah.ms.gov.

James Lynch and the Merging of Religious and Political Reconstruction in Mississippi

by Sean A. Scott

Perhaps no person impacted Reconstruction in Mississippi more than James Lynch. As a Methodist preacher, he sought an integrated church freed from the shackles of caste division. As a Republican organizer and the first African American elected to a state office, he likely did more than any other person to build and grow the party in Mississippi. Despite his achievements, only two scholarly pieces have examined his life in any detail.[1] Neither gives much attention to his contributions to religious reconstruction in Mississippi, which reveals an underlying tension between the secular and sacred endeavors he pursued. A closer examination of his activities in Mississippi demonstrates that over time he altered his political views and social expectations, pragmatically making concessions as conditions dictated. Yet in church affairs, in contrast, he refused to budge on his conviction that integrated ministry and worship must be the policy of the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC). He sometimes wondered if his political activism had compromised his religious effectiveness but ultimately concluded that he could pursue both in good conscience. Political engagement also brought personal attacks on his character and behavior, and the

[1] William C. Harris, "James Lynch: Black Leader in Southern Reconstruction," *Historian* 34 (November 1971): 40-61; William B. Gravely, "James Lynch and the Black Christian Mission During Reconstruction," in *Black Apostles at Home and Abroad: Afro-Americans and the Christian Mission from the Revolution to Reconstruction*, ed. David W. Wills and Richard Newman (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1982), 161-88. In addition to these two articles, scholars of African American religion have capably woven various aspects of his church-related activities into their studies. See Clarence E. Walker, *A Rock in a Weary Land: The African Methodist Episcopal Church During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); Katherine L. Dvorak, *An African-American Exodus: The Segregation of the Southern Churches* (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1991); William E. Montgomery, *Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The African-American Church in the South 1865-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993); Reginald F. Hildebrand, *The Times Were Strange and Stirring: Methodist Preachers and the Crisis of Emancipation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

SEAN A. SCOTT teaches history and is the social studies department head at the Indiana Academy for Science, Mathematics, and Humanities. He is a specialist in the study of religion during the Civil War era and is the author of A Visitation of God: Northern Civilians Interpret the Civil War.

veracity of these allegations is difficult to ascertain. Nevertheless, Lynch soldiered on and ultimately concluded that religious and political organizing duly complemented each other. His hope that Blacks could be integrated into the religious and political landscape of the postwar South proved overly optimistic in light of the divisions, rivalries, and prejudices that existed in both the Methodist church and Republican Party. When combined with outright opposition from conservative southerners, these formidable barriers to change make his views seem downright naïve. Nevertheless, he followed in the tradition of David Walker, Frederick Douglass, and other African American visionaries who affirmed that justice would come in God's timing, and he dedicated over five years of his life to seek its achievement in Mississippi.[2]

Life-Altering Decisions: Denominational Change, Southern Missions, and Political Organizing

In early 1867, twenty-eight-year-old James Lynch engaged in deep soul-searching over his future and how he might best wage the battle for integration and racial equality. A rising star in the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME Church), for the past year he had closely followed, analyzed, and written about Reconstruction as editor of the AME Church's weekly paper, the *Christian Recorder*. Prior to this appointment in Philadelphia, from 1863-65 he had witnessed first-hand the challenges and possibilities of religious reconstruction as an AME missionary in South Carolina and Georgia. For several years, he had maintained that skin color should not define or limit one's church membership or denominational associations, a position that put him at odds with many other AME Church leaders. In his opinion, the end of slavery and the prospect to obtain civil rights and equality before the law indicated a providential opportunity to eradicate segregated churches altogether.[3]

During the Civil War, the Methodist Episcopal Church began sending White missionaries south to organize churches among freed-

[2] See his Independence Day speech of 1865 to illustrate this outlook. James Lynch, *A Few Things About the Educational Work Among the Freedmen of South Carolina and Georgia, Also, Addresses Delivered at Augusta and Nashville* (Baltimore: William K. Boyle, 1865), 21-23.
[3] Gravely, "James Lynch," 167-69, 173; *Christian Recorder* (Philadelphia), April 29, 1865.

people. Lynch had encountered some of them and acknowledged a competitive tension as the two denominations vied for new members. However, at the end of 1865, the MEC established the racially integrated Mississippi Mission Conference. This decision to appoint African American preachers and work together with them as equals caught Lynch's attention, and for some months he wrestled with whether or not he should switch denominations. In early March, he admitted privately to Gilbert Haven, a Methodist pastor in Boston who publicly campaigned against segregated churches, that he wished the AME Church would join the MEC. Regrettably, he believed that his AME Church colleagues would reject any move that would undermine the denomination's autonomy and ultimately jeopardize its continued existence. As a result of its insistence on separation, the AME Church, Lynch concluded, would hinder racial progress. To put it bluntly, Lynch asserted that the AME Church's principles aligned more closely with the views of "[D]emocrats, conservatives, and Southern Methodists." By the end of March, he settled upon his new course and informed Methodist bishop Matthew Simpson of his intention to resign as editor of the *Christian Recorder* at the denomination's annual meeting in May. Convinced that cooperation between Blacks and Whites offered the best hope for helping freedpeople, he wanted to partner with the church that already had begun fostering interracial ties. "My race cannot afford to refuse a union with their white friends in movement for their religious, moral[,] and political elevation. We can help ourselves amazingly," he claimed confidently, "and our salvation depends on such action, but we must be *helped* out of the turbid waters of our degredation [sic]. We can *grasp* the rope and *hold* it, but it must be thrown to us and drawn upward." With Simpson's blessing, he would go south as a Methodist missionary, fully convinced that God had directed him to make this move.[4]

Over the next several weeks Lynch organized his affairs in preparation to leave Philadelphia and met personally with Simpson to discuss his new assignment. He also conversed with Republicans in Congress and agreed to help organize the party in Mississippi with

[4] Daniel W. Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion: The Religious Reconstruction of the South, 1863-1877* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 30; James Lynch to Gilbert Haven, March 2, 1867, Gilbert Haven Papers (United Methodist Archives and History Center, Drew University, Madison, N.J.; hereinafter cited as UMAHC); William Gravely, *Gilbert Haven, Methodist Abolitionist: A Study in Race, Religion, and Reform, 1850-1880* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973), 182-83; Lynch to Matthew Simpson, March 29, 1867, Matthew Simpson Papers (UMAHC).

support from the Union Republican Congressional Executive Committee (URCEC). When the time came to announce his decision to leave the AME Church, he could not steel himself up to it and later claimed that he wanted to avoid offending his friends and colleagues. Even in his final editorial for the *Recorder*, he avoided declaring forthrightly his intention to join the MEC and explained his resignation from the paper as being driven by an overwhelming compulsion that he could accomplish more "religiously and politically" by relocating to the South and "unit[ing] my destiny with that of my people, to live with them, suffer, sorrow, rejoice, and die with them."[5] Fully perceiving the revolution set in motion by passage of the Reconstruction Act earlier that spring, which included assembling conventions to write new state constitutions with delegates chosen by universal male suffrage, he confessed to Simpson, "I fear a year's postponement, as it might prove the losing of grand opportunities not to recur again."[6] For five-and-a-half brief years in this dual capacity as a Methodist preacher and Republican activist, Lynch pursued religious, racial, and political equality in church and nation.

Boots on the Ground

When he arrived in Jackson on July 1, 1867, he immediately found church matters to be unlike what he had anticipated. To this point, he evidently had not yet spoken with any member of the Mississippi Conference, and Simpson seemingly had given the impression that Lynch would oversee churches within the entirety of Mississippi and southern Alabama. Instead, White missionary William Darnell, a former Union soldier and officer of U.S. Colored Troops, met him and reported that Methodists had divided the state into two districts, an unanticipated introduction and unforeseen development that Lynch regarded as "happily disappointing." However, his duties as presiding elder could wait because on July 2 he attended a convention in Vicksburg that laid the groundwork for formal organization of the Mississippi Republican Party later that fall. "The people need my advice in political matters," he informed Bishop Simpson, adding that he hoped "to

[5] Gravely, "James Lynch," 174; Gravely, *Gilbert Haven*, 183.
[6] Lynch to Simpson, May 28, 1867, Simpson Papers (UMAHC); Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865-2001* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 48.

carry the state for human rights and loyal [M]ethodism."[7] Indeed, his chosen modifier demonstrated that he entered Mississippi convinced that Methodist religious beliefs and Republican political ideology went hand in hand.

Lynch immediately threw himself into political organizing and boasted to the URCEC that he gave "three political speeches" and established two Union Leagues in Vicksburg and one in Jackson within his first ten days in Mississippi. He claimed that the meeting in Jackson was "the first radical meeting ever held here," one attended by local politicians, prominent White citizens, and "the great mass of freedmen." Although he found freedpeople to be poor, "very ignorant," and primarily dispersed throughout rural counties working on plantations, Lynch was optimistic about the prospects of forging a Republican majority. In fact, the URCEC had deployed several other agents throughout the South to establish the party. The Ohio lawyer and orator John Mercer Langston also canvassed Mississippi in July 1867 and unexpectedly crossed paths with his "good friend Rev. James Lynch" in Canton. Langston commended his colleague's speech there for its effective vindication of Republican principles and claimed that Lynch "wins many friends wherever he goes." Despite Langston's sanguine report, both silent opponents and vocal antagonists existed, and privately Lynch alluded to the dangers he faced. "Where visions of the halter rise up before me," he wrote without clarifying if he only imagined a worst-case scenario or literally saw nooses in the audience as he spoke, "I commence as a preacher and end as a political speaker."[8] Although Lynch never admitted to any unpleasant confrontations during his first month in Mississippi, rumors of conflict spread nonetheless. He denied in the Democratic press that violence had broken out during a rally in Enterprise on July 31 and claimed instead that he had "been

[7] Lynch to Simpson, July 2, 1867, Simpson Papers (UMAHC); *Minutes of the Third Session of the Mississippi Mission Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Held in New Orleans* (n.p., n.d.), 3; William C. Harris, *The Day of the Carpetbagger: Republican Reconstruction in Mississippi* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 103-04.

[8] Lynch to "My dear Sir" [likely Thomas L. Tullock], July 9, 1867, John Mercer Langston to "Dear Sir," July 24, 1867, Robert C. Schenck Papers (Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University, Oxford, Oh.); Richard Abbott, "Black Ministers and the Organization of the Republican Party in the South in 1867: Letters from the Field," *Hayes Historical Journal* 6 (Fall 1986): rbhayes.org/research/hayes-historical-journal-black-ministers-and-the-republican-party/; Michael W. Fitzgerald, *The Union League Movement in the Deep South: Politics and Agricultural Change During Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 13-14.

treated everywhere with a tolerant and even kind spirit by gentlemen of all shades of political opinion."[9]

Although Lynch may have initially chosen to keep silent about potential perils, he did not hesitate to make known his need for more financial support. Transportation costs were extremely inflated in the postwar South, and he could hardly afford to visit churches or canvass the state without sufficient funds for travel expenses. He implored Bishop Simpson for a $200 advance on his $2,500 annual salary and relied almost exclusively on this money from the MEC since his remuneration from the URCEC amounted to a paltry $37 per month for four months.[10] Interested observers often wondered about who paid the expenses of ministers engaged in political work and questioned whether or not preaching and politicking were compatible. After hearing of Lynch's arrival and subsequent immersion into politics, John P. Newman, who headed the Mississippi Conference and edited the *New Orleans Advocate*, incredulously asked Simpson, "Do you know that Brother Lynch comes South to organize Republican clubs? I question the wisdom of this. But a word from you will be sufficient."[11] Lynch's former AME Church colleague, Henry McNeal Turner, who was working for the URCEC in Georgia, likewise heard "some grumbling" from "a few of our fastidious church members" who complained "that Elder Turner don't preach as well as formerly because he is so absorbed in politics." Turner claimed that he had not received any money from church members while engaged in his political work, but Lynch earned his primary income from Methodists.[12] Nevertheless, what some perceived as a conflict of interests, others simply brushed aside as irrelevant. A Union officer in Meridian praised Lynch as a "conscientious political preacher" whose speech there in late July had "accomplished more good for the cause of Reconstruction than the combined efforts of the Military Authorities and the Freedman's Bureau can accomplish in a month," before reminding the URCEC that Lynch needed more money to continue this early success.[13]

[9] *Daily Clarion* (Jackson, Miss.), August 8, 1867.
[10] Lynch to Simpson, July 2, 1867, Simpson Papers (UMAHC).
[11] John P. Newman to Simpson, July 28, 1867, Box 8, Matthew Simpson Papers (Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.).
[12] Henry McNeal Turner to Thomas L. Tullock, July 23, 1867, Schenck Papers.
[13] Thomas L. Norton to "Dear Sir," July 30, 1867, ibid.

Denominational Rivalries

During his first three months in Mississippi, Lynch grew acclimated to the religious landscape as he visited existing Methodist churches and tried to organize new ones in rural areas. He frequently encountered missionaries from his former denomination scouring the same territory. In some cases, these AME Church preachers had partnered with Whites from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS), which had lost most of its African American congregants since the end of slavery. According to Lynch, one AME Church missionary boarded with White Methodists, slandered northern preachers, and falsely asserted that White southerners cared for freedpeople's well-being and would provide teachers to assist them. These harmful notions, he believed, made the AME Church complicit with unreconstructed rebels in "fostering disloyalty to the government."[14] More hurtful personally, Lynch endured several attacks in the pages of the *Christian Recorder* and felt compelled to explain his reason for joining the MEC. The *Recorder* refused to publish his rejoinder, so he turned to the *New Orleans Advocate* instead. Lynch affirmed his affection for the AME Church and expressed appreciation for all the opportunities the denomination had afforded him, yet he found their missionary efforts in the South and attempted alliance with the MECS to be self-serving and "hypocritical." While the AME Church hoped to perpetuate racial separation, he sought racial equality in religion and politics and regarded the MEC as "God's chosen power" to accomplish integration.[15]

Despite the denominational competition that he perceived as a hindrance, Lynch had success in rallying freedpeople and convincing them to join the MEC. Sometimes he even found unlikely allies. One Saturday in late August in the small town of Shubuta, about forty miles south of Meridian, he delivered "a radical speech to an immense crowd" of African Americans and Whites gathered at the train depot. By radical, he merely meant a fervent appeal to "the Union, liberty[,] and peace," but because this message risked infuriating defiant Whites, the freedmen took precaution and formed a protective bodyguard around him. Auspiciously, nothing amiss occurred during

[14] *New Orleans Advocate*, September 14, 1867.
[15] Ibid., November 2, 1867. Despite attacking him afterward, the AME Church and Lynch parted on good terms. See the resolutions in Benjamin T. Tanner, *An Apology for African Methodism* (Baltimore: n.p., 1867), 177-78.

the address, and afterwards local officials offered him use of the MECS building for Sunday services since it would be unoccupied. However, freedpeople came out in droves and quickly exceeded the seating capacity, so they held services outdoors. Under the watchful eye of a few curious Whites, Lynch preached and explained the MEC's objectives, and nearly all African Americans in attendance clamored to join the newly proposed church. To the surprise of everyone, one planter in attendance offered to give them two acres of land and assist in acquiring building materials for the edifice.[16]

Early Successes

By his own account, Lynch accomplished a great deal politically and religiously during his first few months in the state. He counted seventy-seven public speeches with nearly 50,000 total listeners. He urged Blacks to register so they could elect Republican delegates to the convention that would write the new state constitution. At the same time, he tried to convince Whites that Black suffrage would be mutually advantageous and help cultivate good social and economic relations. In September 1867, his associates demonstrated their esteem by selecting him vice president of the party, and his hard work paid off when Republicans won a majority of delegates to the constitutional convention.[17] In his estimation, his energetic politicking did not detract too much from his church work, for during the same period he preached fifty sermons and organized four new Methodist circuits in the northern and central portions of east Mississippi. He attested to witnessing "overwhelming demonstrations of the Spirit's presence and power" in some of his meetings and emphasized to young freedpeople the importance of education for achieving a better life. Writing to sympathetic Methodists in their denominational weekly, he now readily admitted the personal dangers and risk of bodily harm that he faced as a northern, Methodist, African American preacher and political activist. "There may be trial and suffering in store for us, as a people," he observed, "but we shall succeed. *I have just as much faith in the triumph of truth and right as I have in my God*."[18]

[16] *New Orleans Advocate*, September 14, 1867.
[17] Harris, "James Lynch," 43-45; *Daily Clarion*, August 8, 1867.
[18] *New Orleans Advocate*, November 30, 1867.

Five months of political rallies and religious services confirmed in Lynch's mind the interconnected nature of his work, which reflected the merging on a national scale of Methodist initiatives and Radical Republican politics. He reported to his colleagues during the Mississippi Conference's annual meeting at the end of 1867 that he had expounded on the benefits of congressional Reconstruction and "preached Jesus and the resurrection."[19] Furthermore, the religious education of African Americans through church planting demonstrated the MEC's "patriotism and philanthropy," and the denomination's devotion to aiding Blacks was indisputable evidence that "God has most specially committed to the M. E. Church . . . the destiny of the colored race."[20] During December and January, Lynch traveled east to New York City, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C. to spread news of these advancements and to solicit donations of Bibles and schoolbooks. He met with Matthew Simpson and lauded his success in gaining the ear of political power brokers, citing a recent meeting between the bishop and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton as evidence of "how truly the great heart of loyal Christians beats in sympathy with just and righteous measures." Keeping busy in Washington, he hobnobbed with senators and representatives who pledged continued support for freedpeople, attended a session of the House in which former New York City mayor and Democratic congressman Fernando Wood received a stern "reprimand," and spoke at the Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church.[21] In his address he praised congressional Reconstruction and declared his preference for "universal suffrage," a policy aligned with his vision for racial harmony and cooperation.[22]

After returning to Mississippi, Lynch settled into his duties as Methodist presiding elder. Throughout the spring, he preached to established congregations and organized new ones, administered communion and baptized new converts, held quarterly meetings and received new church members, encouraged preachers previously appointed to the circuits, and found men qualified to pastor new churches. Sometimes he spoke about practical matters, such as one address on "the importance of industry, education, and the exercise of true manhood."[23]

[19] Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 160-61; *Minutes of the Third Session*, 3.
[20] *New Orleans Advocate*, December 7, 1867.
[21] Ibid., February 1, 1868.
[22] *Washington National Republican*, January 14, 1868.
[23] *Daily Clarion*, February 22, 1868; *New Orleans Advocate*, February 29, 1868.

Although African Americans made up the bulk of his church audiences, Whites occasionally attended, primarily curious but on occasion genuinely supportive. In some towns, open-minded members of the MECS allowed him to use their building to hold services, but in other places, he encountered such antagonism that it seemed as if locals would prefer to erect "a Chinese wall" around their communities "to keep out all Yankees, Northern preachers, and teachers."[24]

Defending His Message and Activities

As Lynch approached the first anniversary of his move to Mississippi, it appeared that he was deftly juggling his religious and political responsibilities. Serving as Methodist presiding elder prevented him from participating in the state constitutional convention from January to May 1868. Nevertheless, his influence and recognized leadership garnered an appointment as a delegate to the Republican National Convention in Chicago that nominated Ulysses S. Grant for president. In fact, he was the lone African American sent by Mississippi. While he traveled the state rousing freedmen to join the Republicans, he took care to define their goals and aspirations in order to avoid alarming Whites. "We are animated by a controlling desire to secure for ourselves equality before the law and the ballot box," the fundamental rights necessary for "the protection of life and liberty." Forcing unwanted social integration was not the Republican agenda. Although some African Americans would seek office as a necessary means to safeguard their rights against intense antagonism, they had no intention of instituting a political revolution that would result in Black "supremacy."[25]

Despite this clear message, Democrats misrepresented his objectives and slandered him in the press. One observer acknowledged that he was a "talented" public speaker but ultimately classified him as a cowardly, malicious "demagogue" who appealed to emotion rather than reason and whose arguments would be easily refuted by "the well informed, practical, white man."[26] The state's Democratic Execu-

[24] *New Orleans Advocate*, March 7, April 18, May 2, 1868; *Christian Advocate* (New York), April 23, 1868.
[25] *Daily Clarion*, February 18, 1868; *Vicksburg (Miss.) Weekly Republican*, May 26, 1868, quoted in Harris, "James Lynch," 46.
[26] *Daily Clarion*, June 12, 1868.

tive Committee alleged that Lynch was organizing secret societies that required loyalty oaths and conducted "midnight drills."[27] They claimed that he used religion as a pretext to gain the ear of freedpeople, then wielded his clerical authority to speak "like an oracle—a military commander with power over life and death."[28] Democratic chairman John Freeman dishonestly declared that Lynch's political organizing of freedmen ultimately sought "to disfranchise the white race in Mississippi and seize and appropriate the offices and revenues of the State."[29] Radical Republicans included proscription of former Confederates in the proposed constitution, which effectively divided the party and disregarded the views of moderates like Lynch and most Black voters, who supported universal male suffrage. This Confederate ban roused conservative Whites and ultimately doomed the constitution's passage, a development that staunch Democrat Thomas J. Wharton interpreted as evidence of God's blessing on his party. Indeed, an exuberant Wharton claimed that Blacks were still loyal to their former masters, despite the attempted Radical brain-washing by Lynch and other influential African American preachers, "high priests of his Satanic Majesty [who] mingled religion and politics—alternately holding prayer meetings and Loyal League meetings."[30]

Lynch, of course, placed his allegiance on the other side of the spiritual conflict as he linked preaching the gospel and promoting racial and social uplift of freedpeople through political involvement. "We are striving in this State to convince our oppressors by reason, persuasion[,] and practical demonstration, that the mission of the Methodist Episcopal Church is the extension of the kingdom of Christ, the elevation of fallen humanity."[31] Harsh rhetoric aside, White southerners perceived the mutually reinforcing nature of these religious and political meetings, and Lynch acknowledged that Democrats sought to disrupt Methodist church extension because the denomination was inextricably linked with the national policies of Radical Reconstruction. While he sought to convey a welcoming spirit of "peacefulness

[27] Ibid., June 23, 1868.
[28] Ibid., June 13, 1868.
[29] Ibid., June 23, 1868.
[30] Ibid., July 1, 1868; Michael Perman, *The Road to Redemption: Southern Politics, 1869-1879* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 25-26, 36-37. See Harris, *Day of the Carpetbagger*, 115-98, for a detailed account of the constitutional convention and 1868 campaign.
[31] *New Orleans Advocate*, August 29, October 17, 1868.

and conciliation," he refused to back down and "resolved . . . to preach or fight."[32] However, he knew that a martial demeanor alone could not secure his safety to travel and evangelize. "I think that religious and political freedom in the South is entirely conditioned on the election of General Grant," he wrote five weeks before the presidential canvass.[33] Grant's subsequent triumph at the polls caused great jubilation among Mississippi's Blacks, and Lynch regarded the outcome as nothing short of providential. Exuding optimism, he predicted that Grant's presidency would secure "civil and political equality" for African Americans.[34]

Lynch could care less if many southern Whites deemed the MEC to be a politicized organization, and he reciprocated this sentiment toward the MECS. He informed Bishop Simpson that the MECS had cut ties with some White preachers of good character and standing simply because they had accepted policies of Radical Reconstruction. He even attended the MECS's conference in Meridian in early December and listened to Bishop Thomas Summers preach a sermon on the "Unity of the Human Race" from Acts 17:26. At first, the fifty-six-year-old cleric seemed to Lynch to be as divinely inspired as the Apostle Paul on Mars Hill in Athens because he employed scientific and theological arguments to refute the theory that Blacks constituted a separate race that was not fully human. "Christ died for those only who sprang from Adam, and he died for the black man," Summers pronounced, "therefore the black man sprang from Adam." However, the southern bishop quickly fell in Lynch's estimation and, in keeping with the prejudices of his audience, insisting that Blacks were an inferior branch of the human race. Since Summers embodied "the most liberal sentiment" to be found in the MECS yet still affirmed "the dogma of natural inferiority" of Blacks, Lynch concluded that the denomination had forfeited any claim to the allegiance of freedpeople, and its efforts to minister to them by starting "*Colored* Conference[s]" throughout the South reeked of insincerity and a desire to perpetuate segregated worship.[35]

These disingenuous overtures underscored the urgency of his

[32] *Christian Advocate*, September 24, 1868.
[33] *New Orleans Advocate*, October 17, 1868.
[34] Ibid., November 14, 1868.
[35] Lynch to Simpson, December 3, 5, 1868, in William B. Gravely, "A Black Methodist on Reconstruction in Mississippi: Three Letters by James Lynch in 1868-1869," *Methodist History* 11 (July 1973): 10, 14-15; *New Orleans Advocate*, December 19, 1868.

work in Mississippi. Although one MEC bishop had implied at a recent national conference that the denomination should concentrate its limited resources for domestic missions on a few locations rather than casting a wide net and spreading itself too thin, Lynch insisted on taking the opposite approach. His interactions with freedpeople convinced him that their interest in joining the MEC would never be greater, so he recommended that the MEC enlarge the territory under its influence. In the race against the MECS, the MEC "must possess the ground or give it up to this politico-ecclesiastical absurdity that is the bellows blowing into life the dying fires of hostility to the Government." He developed an expansive vision for the MEC in Mississippi, analogous to "almost like founding an empire." Besides establishing more churches, he advocated starting a seminary to allow freedmen to learn all aspects of pastoral ministry. Furthermore, he launched his own newspaper, the *Colored Citizens' Monthly*, to assist the general religious education and civic awareness of freedpeople.[36]

Near the end of 1868, Matthew Simpson observed firsthand the MEC's growing imprint when he presided at the Mississippi Conference's annual meeting in Jackson. The number of ministers and total membership in the state had nearly doubled, and thirty-five African Americans received preaching appointments for 1869. Yet after listening to these men narrate their experiences in the spiritual trenches, Simpson concurred with Lynch's assessment that the MEC needed a training school for these freedmen, who oftentimes compensated for their lack of formal education with a "divine power" that characterized their ministries. In stark contrast, in his report to a New England paper, Simpson described Lynch as "one of the most talented" preachers he had ever met. "I doubt whether, as an orator and as a man of executive ability, he has his superior, if his equal, among the colored people," the bishop gushed. Despite his optimism at witnessing Lynch's leadership and the significant achievements and immense potential of scores of men only a few years removed from slavery, Simpson admitted that the goal of having integrated churches in the South was proving difficult to achieve. The MEC had "little influence" over White southerners, and most of them were prejudiced against having Blacks

[36] Lynch to Simpson, December 3, 5, 1868, in Gravely, "A Black Methodist," 9-14; *Christian Advocate*, October 22, 1868.

in the pulpit.[37] Furthermore, many southern Whites were also "embittered" against the MEC because "they have identified us in their thoughts with the great movements of . . . emancipation and education." Although he commissioned Black preachers of the conference as "standard-bearer[s] of [nothing] else than the cross of Christ," in reality southern Whites would regard all members of the MEC as Republican partisans.[38]

Despite this fact, Lynch seemed convinced that relations between Whites and Blacks were indeed improving. On a few occasions in early 1869, he preached to mixed congregations and secured the MECS buildings for meetings. By the end of February, he boasted that prejudice and hatred were "rapidly melting away" and would shortly become relics of the distant past. In his mind, anyone who questioned the propriety of integrated conferences was behind the times and hindered "the grand advance of Methodism." If Mississippi's legislature could become biracial, he reasoned, so could the church. However, Lynch's faith in people rapidly abandoning their biases was clearly misplaced, even as he acknowledged that congregations formed close bonds based on "similarities of taste, training, social position, and social affinities." Contrary to his naive claims, most Whites in Mississippi were far from willing to discard their racial prejudices. At best, they had tolerated political integration because they saw no other option but to comply with the decrees of Radical Reconstruction. At worst, they would resist these changes and the representatives of the new order with violence, if necessary.[39]

Assassination Attempt

On Saturday, March 13, 1869, Lynch arrived in Lexington around two o'clock and received permission from the sheriff to use the Holmes County courthouse to hold a quarterly meeting that evening at eight o'clock. As the time approached, African Americans filled most

[37] *Zion's Herald* (Boston), January 28, 1869.
[38] *Christian Advocate*, March 4, April 22, 1869. Ironically, the New England Conference, despite Gilbert Haven's best efforts to promote integration, suffered from a similar intolerance. Although the conference admitted African American pastor John N. Mars into its ranks, no congregation was willing to accept his services, and he ultimately was transferred to a church in the all-Black Baltimore Conference.
[39] *New Orleans Advocate*, February 10, 1869; *Zion's Herald*, March 25, 1869; Harris, *Day of the Carpetbagger*, 162.

seats with the noticeable exception of about a dozen White men sitting near the door, some whispering quietly, others laughing, and at least one distinctly asking, "Which is Lynch?" After the local preacher began his sermon, five or six of the men stood up and entered the jury room. Around fourteen minutes later, they emerged from the room and exited the building. This departure may have served as a signal, for about a minute later a shot rang out, possibly from the back of the courtroom, and missed Lynch's head by about two inches. Two more shots followed, likely fired into the building from outdoors. Lynch's associates scrambled to form a defensive shield around him and safely ushered him out of the courthouse. That night seventeen armed men, including the sheriff, who deemed Lynch still to be in danger, protected him at his lodging. Their precaution proved well placed because throughout the night twelve to fifteen men milled about the building, at times cursing Lynch loud enough to be heard. The next morning a few locals tried to convince him that some rowdies had thrown fireworks into the building, but a bullet hole in the window about two inches above where Lynch had sat refuted this contrived explanation. He believed that the attack was premeditated with intent to kill, undertaken simply because he was "*an active preacher of the Methodist Episcopal Church . . .* [and] a Radical of public influence." After learning of the attempted assassination, provisional governor Adelbert Ames, a former Union general from Maine who favored political equality for African Americans, promised that "no pains shall be spared to ferret out and punish the guilty parties," but this provided limited comfort. "*Free speech and religious toleration [do] not exist in Mississippi*," Lynch thundered in exasperation. "Every man *who is not a fool* knows that the moral, intellectual, and religious elevation of the race is my aim," and the imperiling of his life simply for "preaching, instructing, and organizing schools" proved that the opposition was "insane and wicked."[40]

After this close brush with death, Lynch altered his views about White Mississippians, at least temporarily, and about their capacity to accept African Americans as political or social equals. He poured out his frustration in a combination of self-pity and renewed determination to continue the struggle. Comparing himself to a soldier engaged in battle, he exaggerated, "No man in Mississippi was ever more hated by

[40] *Colored Citizens' Monthly*, copied in *Tri Weekly Clarion*, March 23, 1869; *New Orleans Advocate*, April 3, 1869; *Christian Advocate*, April 8, 1869.

the Rebels—and ninety-nine hundredths are Rebels—than myself." He refused to moderate his views, despite being "conciliatory" in demeanor. His presence, speech, and actions served as a constant reminder of the manhood of African Americans and infuriated members of the MECS and Democratic Party, whom he blamed for leading the charge "to crush me out." Despite hundreds of Black witnesses, the leading citizens of Lexington all dismissed the events at the courthouse as much ado about nothing. Among Whites, only the sheriff and a constable backed his version of events, and the latter even identified a local resident as having fired a shot from the courthouse lawn. The citizen, however, produced an alibi and was released, demonstrating that no African American could obtain justice in the courts.[41] Gilbert Haven became so incensed after reading Lynch's account that he lashed out against President Grant, writing that the chief executive needed to "say *and* do something which shall preserve the lives of loyal citizens" or be personally culpable for the blood of ministers killed for "peaceably preaching to their own congregations."[42]

Republican Infighting and Personal Attacks

Lynch's invective against White Mississippians may have lasted only a few weeks as a result of nearly losing his life, or he may have purposefully intended it to serve as a rallying cry to his anti-caste Methodist friends. In either case, in 1869 Mississippi Republicans were sharply divided, with radical, moderate, and conservative factions vying for the support of President Grant and Congress. Lynch already had broken ranks with Radical Republicans, who demanded the disfranchisement of former Confederates, and his political sense, combined with the appeal of potentially holding office, allowed him to help shape the moderate Republican platform. As the first African American member of the party's executive committee, he insisted that political victory and Reconstruction's ultimate success lay in integrated cooperation based on the policies of "universal suffrage and universal amnesty." As long as Whites accepted "equal political rights" for African Americans, any cause for continued division or animosity ceased. At the end of July, Lynch expressed these sentiments during

[41] *Zion's Herald*, April 22, 1869.
[42] Ibid., April 15, 1869.

a meeting with President Grant and emphasized the progress African Americans had made in the state. In keeping with Grant's campaign slogan, he accentuated that Mississippians desired peace. For this to be true, of course, he had to overlook the recent attempt on his life, knowing full well that the attack was no aberration. In fact, a month earlier in Oxford, Lynch's colleague Alexander Phillips had been shot in the mouth by a White man with no known motive for assaulting him – other than his position as an African American Methodist preacher.[43]

Lynch's status as the leading African American in the moderate Republican camp irked some Radical Republicans, perhaps none more so than Henry R. Pease, a thirty-four-year-old New England carpetbagger, former Union officer, and superintendent of the Freedmen's Bureau's educational work in Mississippi. Lynch's moderation also secured powerful political allies, particularly General Adelbert Ames, whom Congress had appointed as Mississippi's military governor in 1868. When Oliver O. Howard, commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau in Washington, ordered General F. D. Sewall, his inspector and adjutant general, to inquire about finding someone to assist Pease, Ames enthusiastically endorsed Lynch. Sewall was "very favorably impressed" with Lynch, heard only positive reports from people he interviewed, and concluded that the preacher would be a perfect choice for visiting schools "in the interior and more remote districts" of the state. Ames commended Lynch as "one of the most honest and . . . talented" candidates who, more importantly, supported the moderates and opposed "the selfish, dishonest whites who propose to ride into power" with African American votes but, once elected, reveal their true Democratic loyalties. It was an easy decision for Howard to appoint Lynch as assistant superintendent of schools, but rivalry, jealously, and possibly Lynch's own actions resulted in a brief and tumultuous partnership with the Freedmen's Bureau.[44]

---

[43] Gravely, "James Lynch," 176-78; Harris, *Day of the Carpetbagger*, 104, 230, 233; Perman, *Road to Redemption*, 13; *Weekly Clarion*, July 29, 1869; *Zion's Herald*, August 5, 1869; *Methodist Advocate* (Atlanta), June 30, 1869.

[44] Harris, *Day of the Carpetbagger*, 316; F. D. Sewall to E. Whittlesey, April 28, 1869, Registers and Letters Received by the Commissioner of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872 (National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.; hereinafter cited as NARA), M 752, reel 63; Adelbert Ames to Oliver O. Howard, May 11, 1869, series 3, box 8, folder 20, Oliver Otis Howard Papers (George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections & Archives, Bowdoin College Library, Brunswick, Maine), www.library.bowdoin.edu/arch/mss/oohg.shtml#.

Ironically, Howard sent Lynch's commission to Pease, who dutifully notified his new associate, but the cooperation stopped there. Howard may have assumed that Pease could assign Lynch appropriate tasks for the moment, but Pease used his lack of explicit directions from his superior as an excuse to leave Lynch in the lurch. Hoping for some clear instructions, Lynch "respectfully beg[ged]" Ames to "indicate the course I shall pursue at as early day as possible" and implored Howard to advise "what I should do . . . [and] *how* to proceed." Ames promptly realized that Pease was purposefully stonewalling Lynch because of their political differences and alerted Howard that "Capt. Pease seems to be opposed to Lynch." He not so subtly reminded Howard that the Republican Party's future was at stake in Mississippi, and Lynch's moderation was more conducive to its "interests" and sustainability than Pease's "extreme" position. When Howard finally sent instructions through his staff in Washington, he charged Lynch to "report at once by letter" to Pease, who "will assign you to duty."[45]

Unable to contain his contempt for Lynch, on June 1 Pease addressed a derisive denunciation to his sympathetic supervisor John W. Alford, a sixty-two-year-old Congregationalist minister, former army chaplain, and current superintendent of education for the Freedmen's Bureau. Pease was flabbergasted that Howard had appointed Lynch and alleged, "There is not a colored man in the United States who has so little sympathy with the General and so openly and persistently opposed his administration of the Bureau for the past two years." If this had been true, the state's Democratic press certainly would have reported it widely, and they would have brought excerpts from unflattering speeches to the attention of congressional leaders and military personnel. In private, Lynch had complained that the Bureau "has always given the 'cold shoulder' to Methodism" when its agents sought government funds to further its educational interests, but this criticism fell far short of Pease's claim. Pease next faulted Lynch for sins of omission, namely a failure to praise Howard in the pages of the *Colored Citizens' Monthly*, which had a total of six issues in print at this point. Furthermore, Pease claimed that in private conversation Lynch

[45] Lynch to Ames, May 27, 1869, Ames to Howard, May 28, 1869, series 3, box 8, folder 26, Howard Papers; Lynch to Howard, May 31, 1869, Registers and Letters Received, M 752, reel 63; E. Whittlesey to Lynch, June 2, 1869, Selected Series of Records Issued by the Commissioner of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872 (NARA), M 742, reel 5.

"had the impudence to say to me in my office that 'Gen Howard didn't amount to anything. He was no doubt a very good man, a Christian gentleman[,] but not the man for the position he held.'" If workplace gossip did not persuade Alvord of Lynch's ill-suited match with the Bureau, Pease assumed his pièce de résistance would tip the scales against his nemesis. As conclusive evidence that Lynch "has in fact thrown his influence against the Bureau work in this state," Pease recounted that freedpeople had desired to confer on Howard "a testimonial of the[ir] high esteem" by contributing one penny each, but Lynch quashed this small gesture of appreciation. The catalogue of Lynch's anti-Freedmen's Bureau offenses complete, Pease offered his personal estimation of the preacher. "The truth is, friend Alvord, all his efforts among his people are for *James Lynch*," a remarkable criticism considering Pease's own political ambitions and the fact that only five weeks earlier he had successfully nominated his wife to serve as a clerk in his office, conveniently increasing their income by $75 per month. Pease then conceded that Lynch was indeed "accomplishing a great deal in the general work of enlightening and *particularly* in *Methodistizing* the Freedmen in this state." However, he considered Lynch utterly self-conceited and limited in real talent or aptitude, certainly incapable of "attain[ing] in a lifetime" the "solid worth and ability, natural and acquired," already possessed by John Mercer Langston, the founding dean of Howard University's law school. Finally finished deprecating Lynch, Pease disingenuously concluded, "I shall most certainly manage to work harmoniously. There [are] not to my knowledge any feelings other than of the most kindly nature between us." For some reason, perhaps a pang of conscience, a realization that pettiness would not countermand Lynch's appointment, or his new clerk's intuition, Pease held onto the letter.[46]

Three-and-a-half weeks passed, during which time Pease and Lynch may have never crossed paths since the former resided in Vicksburg and the latter lived in Jackson when not traveling to churches. The underlying tensions cascaded out on the morning of June 26, 1869, when Pease read in the newspaper that Lynch had been appointed to

[46] Henry R. Pease to John W. Alvord, June 1, 1869, Records of the Education Division of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1871 (NARA), M 803, reel 9; Lynch to Simpson, December 5, 1868, in Gravely, "A Black Methodist," 14; Pease to E. Whittlesey, April 24, May 26, 1869, Registers and Letters Received, M 752, reel 63.

replace him. Shortly before noon, he telegraphed Alvord to ascertain if this report were indeed true. Fearing that his dreams of political ascendancy had been dashed, he resumed his unsent letter by conjecturing that someone must have "imposed upon" General Howard or made "false representations" against him. However, he had a bombshell of his own to counteract the harm done, one that could potentially save him and ruin Lynch. "On the night of the eighth of this month the Rev James Lynch was arrested and confined in the jail of Jackson for drunkenness and disorderly conduct. The matter was hushed up. Gen Ames quickly released him in the morning. I knew nothing of it until a few days since." In case anyone at the Bureau's offices in Washington doubted the veracity of such an explosive assertion, both White and Black witnesses in Jackson could corroborate the details. The incident had been hushed up because Ames wanted to prevent "the enemies of reconstruction" from using it "against him and his administration." Detrimental publicity aside, Lynch's public intoxication was not an isolated indiscretion, Pease alleged, as George E. Harris claimed to have "seen him drunk frequently . . . several years since." Lest Alvord suspect Pease's motivation for spreading such damaging reports, he divulged his intention to seek election as superintendent of public instruction, and a demotion at the Bureau might jeopardize his future electoral prospects. Furthermore, public knowledge that he had leaked the damning evidence would cause a vindictive Lynch to "throw his influence against me" in this upcoming contest, thereby necessitating that Alvord maintain utmost confidentiality in this matter.[47]

In an attempt to bolster his case and furnish additional informants, that same day Pease apparently telegraphed two allies and recruited them to come to his aid. John P. Bardwell, a supervisor of teachers with the American Missionary Association, expressed profound "regret" to a Freedmen's Bureau inspector that Pease had been supplanted by the self-aggrandizing Methodist preacher and repeated the charges of public intoxication, "disorderly conduct," and recurring bouts of drunken behavior. AME Church pastor, fellow Republican organizer, and Lynch's chief African American antagonist, Thomas W. Stringer, sang a similar tune directly to General Howard, even complaining that the general's mistake "will destrowy [sic] us." Howard's

[47] Pease to Alvord, June 26 addendum to June 1, 1869; Pease to Alvord, June 26, 1869 (telegram), Records of the Education Division, M 803, reel 9.

own brother Charles eventually joined the chorus. Although silent regarding the issue of intemperance, he wildly claimed that Lynch had "secured the approbation of Rebels in making speeches *opposed to reconstruction*," sufficient reason enough to disqualify him from being superintendent. After the flurry of allegations, Howard cashiered Lynch, never having directed that he supersede Pease in the first place. Pease's swift reaction to a spurious newspaper report not only removed his nemesis but elevated his Radical ally Stringer. Alvord aptly summed up this unanticipated turn of events for Pease when he wrote, "I congratulate you that *the way opens again* before you, and with promise of increased prosperity."[48]

Word of Lynch's offenses eventually spread beyond Jackson. Later that month, the editor of the *Vicksburg Herald* called him a "drunkard" and challenged him to deny the charge. Far from making an unequivocal refutation, he instead answered evasively. "I have maintained an unblemished reputation since my infancy. Those who know me will declare they never saw me *use liquor or act under its influence*."[49] It may have been true that no friends or close acquaintances observed him inebriated on the night of June 8, but a direct denial of drunkenness would have made his side of the story more believable, especially when subsequent allegations of similar behavior emerged.

However, neither Pease's letters nor unfavorable newspaper reports would determine Lynch's fate. Adelbert Ames ultimately held the trump card, and whether for personal or political reasons, he would not allow Lynch to be dispatched so easily. Whatever transpired on the night of June 8, Ames convinced Howard that it did not stem from a fatal character flaw or in any way disqualify Lynch from continuing to work at the Freedmen's Bureau. Either Ames brazenly deceived Howard to save Lynch or, more likely, the allegation of intemperance was patently false or could be explained and forgiven based on more detailed knowledge of the circumstances. Howard at least thought so, for he reinstated Lynch and confessed to Pease, "I have certainly

[48] J. P. Bardwell to S. N. Clark, June 26, 1869, Thomas W. Stringer to O. O. Howard, June 26, 1869, series 3, box 8, folder 35, Howard Papers; Charles Howard to O. O. Howard, July 6, 1869, ibid., folder 38; Alvord to Pease, July 2, 1869, Records of the Education Division, M 803, reel 4; Pease to Alvord, July 8, 1869, ibid., M 803, reel 9; Pease to E. Whittlesey, July 12, 1869, Registers and Letters Received, M752, reel 63; Henry M. Whittlesey to Pease, July 19, 1869, Selected Series, M 742, reel 5.
[49] *Vicksburg Herald*, July 17, 1869, https://much-ado.net/legislators/legislators/james-lynch/liquor/.

wronged him though unwittingly." He referred Pease to seek out Ames for answers to any lingering questions and stipulated that henceforth the two men "*must* cooperate" despite their differing political views. After recommending that both Lynch and Stringer be sent out to inspect schools and encourage education, Howard urged party unity at all costs. "If you Republicans divide in Mississippi you are no where—let the bolters go but don't help them by pushing personal contentions too far." Not one to avoid reproving the erring, the "Christian General" warned Pease, "I had some accusations the other day against you of profane swearing. I hope it is untrue. If it is true, you *must stop* such a suicidal practice. You cannot lead little children to Heaven by cursing and ill-treating your Best Friend."[50]

Lynch's personal reputation may have been tarnished by Pease's campaign, but for the time being, he won the intramural conflict and emerged unscathed politically. Sometime in late July, a faction of Radical Republicans in Jackson allegedly produced resolutions demanding his removal from the party. C. F. Norris, an African American barber who later served briefly in the state legislature, even threatened to hang and burn Lynch in effigy. However, Henry Mayson, also a former barber, newspaperman, and future legislator, rallied to his defense and denounced the mobocratic spirit. Fighting ensued, resulting in several arrests by the police, but Lynch maintained his standing within the party. After conservatives, calling themselves National Union Republicans, bolted the regular party and nominated President Grant's brother-in-law Louis Dent to be their candidate for governor, moderates selected former Confederate James L. Alcorn to head their state ticket and nominated Lynch for secretary of state. Now even more of a target, the opposition press did its utmost to smear Lynch before the November election. A report from Brookhaven claimed that the "Rabid Radical nominee for Secretary of State" nearly caused a riot due to the "incendiary" nature of his campaign speech there. Then in early October, editor Ethelbert Barksdale, a Dent supporter, divulged that Pease was the informant who had accused Lynch of "drunkenness, profanity, and other abominable practices in the sight of God and man" which resulted in the preacher's dismissal from the Bureau. He misleadingly claimed that Pease, who recently had been nominated for

[50] Howard to Lynch, July 29, 1869, Howard to Pease, July 29, 1869, Selected Series, M 742, roll 5.

superintendent of public instruction, snitched on his "boon companion" for the public good rather than out of any private vendetta. Publicizing the spat was a win-win proposition for Barksdale since the allegations, if true, revealed Lynch to be altogether unfit for office or, if false, disqualified Pease as a scheming liar.[51]

Around the same time that Barksdale drew attention to Lynch's alleged public intoxication, the preacher again came under General Howard's scrutiny. "It is reported to me that you are employed in editing a daily paper, and that you are employed also as a presiding elder and that you have done no Bureau duty whatever," a perturbed Howard wrote. "If these things be true, ought you not resign? I must have work done." The general clearly knew little about Lynch or his activities, but his source was not completely wrong. Lynch admitted that he had not visited a school that Pease had assigned to him, but he made the excuse that this task predated his removal. Since Pease had not communicated with him at all since his reinstatement, he offered this as conclusive evidence "that my removal from the Bureau was sought for political purposes . . . before our nominating convention met." Ignoring Howard's central concern, Lynch pointed out his overwhelming popularity among Republicans because he had received four times as many votes as his nearest challenger Stringer in the nomination for secretary of state. "Thus you will perceive that my services and worth in the cause of elevating my race must be considered, here at least, as being faithfully rendered." Resigning at this juncture "would greatly injure" Republican prospects in the coming election and strengthen the Democratic attack against him. "I hope General that it will be kept as a sealed book from the opposition (democrats) that any complaints were ever made against me at the Bureau," he cautioned, for he could parry their blows and gain office as long as "they can get nothing from your department against me." In order to bolster his case, Lynch secured Governor Ames's endorsement that he continue with the Freedmen's Bureau. Ames reminded Howard that this unfortunate controversy began because "Capt Pease has I fear forgotten certain Christian virtues in his hostility" to Lynch, and keeping them both with the Bureau would "be best for the cause." Further underscoring Lynch's importance to the party, the chairman of the Republican state

[51] *Tri-Weekly Clarion*, July 29, September 30, October 2, 1869; Harris, *Day of the Carpetbagger*, 241-44.

executive committee maintained that the party fully supported Lynch and considered the accusations against him to be "a species of persecution unjust and uncalled for."[52]

Self-Doubt

Howard's letter may have shown Lynch that he was trying to do too much, or perhaps the personal attacks and partisan acrimony endemic to politics were starting to wear him down. He informed readers of the *Methodist Advocate*, a new denominational weekly published in Atlanta, that Mississippi was engulfed in "a terrible political excitement" and requested prayer that "the church may stand as a tower for Jesus in the midst of it." Seemingly conflicted about his political engagement, he sought direction from Bishop Matthew Simpson, who previously had advised him to follow his own "judgment and conscience." His successful nomination to office had not quenched the nagging questions regarding the rectitude of spending so much time politicking when the church needed his undivided attention, and he asserted that he had remained in politics "[w]ith great reluctance" and out of a desire to encourage others. "[I]n the terrible whirlwind of political excitement," he confessed, "I feel that Christ's Church is starving and suffering for the bread which I would give were I devoted with singleness to the ministry." But at the same time, his political activities "increase the borders of the church[,] for as I go I *preach*." Assuring Simpson that he endeavored to balance these seemingly competing commitments "the best I can," he offered to withdraw his name from the ballot should the bishop deem it proper. Lest Simpson doubt his devotion to his spiritual duties, he added, "Dear Bishop[,] be assured that I shall neglect no interest of the Church, for it lies near my heart." Lynch certainly regarded Simpson as a father figure (even naming his son born later that year after the bishop). It seemed natural that he would pour out his heart to the Bishop and share his inner doubts and struggles.[53] But the letter could also be interpreted as an informational update from a dutiful subordinate, one intended to secure his superi-

[52] Howard to Lynch, September 24, 1869, Selected Series, M 742, reel 5; Lynch to Howard, October 2, 1869, with undated endorsement by Ames to Howard, R. C. Powers to Howard, October 2, 1869, Records of the Education Division, M 803, reel 9.
[53] *Methodist Advocate*, September 29, 1869; Lynch to Simpson, October 6, 1869, in Gravely, "A Black Methodist," 15-16; *Zion's Herald*, February 11, 1869.

or's approval for an already chosen course. Given his popularity among Blacks and influence among moderate Republicans, it seems improbable that he would have withdrawn from the ticket and just as unlikely that Simpson would have asked him to do so. Both shared the conviction that the MEC's religious objectives and the Republican Party's political agenda constituted mutually reinforcing goals to aid Blacks.

Political Triumph

Whatever Lynch's intent in notifying Simpson, he stayed in the race and campaigned hard. Despite an emphasis on "equal rights before the law and at the ballot-box" without forced social integration, his message of interracial harmony and cooperation was ignored by opponents, who accused him of holding the exact opposite opinions.[54] "*He has done more to organize the colored people for the disfranchisement of the whites of Mississippi, and to create strife between the races, than any other half dozen men*," Barksdale claimed, branding Lynch "a constant agent of incendiarism" whose election would inaugurate a "reign of Blood, Terror, and Plunder."[55] The extensive travel took its toll on him, and on one occasion near the end of October he looked "very much fatigued" and could not deliver a speech. According to an eyewitness, a local physician took Lynch to a grog shop, where he "freely imbibed." As a result, his spirit revived and his tongue loosened.[56] Lynch reportedly denounced his opponent's policies, consigned him to hell, and even "utter[ed] oaths upon the public streets." The second account of public intoxication gave greater credence to the veracity of the earlier one. And the context of his ill health – that he took "a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities" (as Paul counseled Timothy) might explain how Lynch convinced Ames that he did not have a drinking problem. If the allegations were true, the public lapses did not harm him at the polls. Blacks voted in large numbers, many Whites stayed home, and Lynch easily won the office of secretary of state.[57]

Forbearing to gloat or seek retribution against those who had smeared him, he stressed that Republicans needed to govern well and

[54] *Jackson Weekly Mississippi Pilot*, November 27, 1869 (first quote).
[55] *Tri-Weekly Clarion*, November 6, 1869.
[56] *Weekly Clarion*, November 11, 1869.
[57] *Tri-Weekly Clarion*, November 11, 1869; I Timothy 5:23; Harris, *Day of the Carpetbagger*, 257.

follow through with their campaign promises to provide quality public education and sustain universal male suffrage. General Howard evidently watched the returns closely and all but pushed Lynch out the door with a not-so-subtle suggestion that Lynch's resignation "will be favorably considered." Already spread too thin before his election, Lynch resigned from the Freedmen's Bureau, probably without having done much, if any, official work.[58] The same popularity and influence that had secured the Bureau post now catapulted his name into discussions for the U.S. Senate. However, he withdrew from consideration and publicly expressed his conviction that he could better help African Americans achieve "political equality" by staying in Mississippi rather than going to Washington. He also knew that Radicals in the state legislature disliked him and may have feigned disinterest in order to promote party unity and avoid a squabble over the nomination. This paved the way for the comparatively unknown and less accomplished preacher-politician Hiram Revels to become the first African American appointed to the U.S. Senate in 1870. Lynch rejoiced in Revels's triumph and fervently defended his former AME Church colleague when Democratic papers maliciously slandered him.[59] Without knowing the situation in Mississippi, Gilbert Haven boldly asserted that Lynch "ought to have been elected Senator. Probably he chooses to be made a Bishop. . . . If we take the most popular man we have in the South, it will be hard to match him."[60]

Other Methodists hailed Lynch as a primary catalyst of Methodist growth in Mississippi. 1870 marked the beginning of the Mississippi Conference's fifth year of existence and the second year since Louisiana had been placed in a separate conference. The conference had expanded to over 15,000 members plus an additional 3,000 probationers, and this numerical growth necessitated that the two original districts be subdivided. As a presiding elder over the most successful southern missionary field, Lynch displayed administrative skills that prompted one observer to claim, "Perhaps no more successful district work was ever performed among us." The same writer erroneously maintained that the preacher's popularity among Blacks and desire to

[58] Harris, *Day of the Carpetbagger*, 262-68; E. Whittlesey to Lynch, December 10, 1869, Selected Series, M 742, reel 6; Lynch to Howard, December 13, 1869, Registers and Letters Received, M 752, reel 65.
[59] *Weekly Mississippi Pilot*, December 11, 1869, January 22, 29, February 19, 1870.
[60] *Zion's Herald*, January 27, 1870.

help them escape "political thraldom" drew him "unawares" into politics, culminating in his recent election. The writer lamented that Lynch could not devote all his attention to ministry but asserted that he was "clearly justified" in seeking elected office and would capably balance the duties of both jobs.[61] Lynch certainly was conscious of the perceived conflict of interests and proclaimed, "I have not missed holding meetings a single Sabbath since Conference." He was not alone in juggling political and ecclesiastical responsibilities. Several African American Methodist preachers won seats in the state legislature yet continued to preach on Sundays. Lynch commended these colleagues, "It is a marvel how they hold unabated interest in preaching the Gospel." He also lauded Governor James L. Alcorn as "a great friend to religious progress" for his support of using the Bible in the state's schools.[62]

Political Letdown

The times seemed heady, indeed, with the end of military rule and restoration of civil government in Mississippi after the new legislature ratified the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments. In a speech celebrating passage of the latter amendment, Lynch connected universal male suffrage to the Declaration of Independence's affirmation of equality. He hoped that southern Whites, "having an identity of interest with men once their slaves but now their fellow-citizens [and] political equals," would form "a bond of friendship and confidence" and work together "in a spirit of conciliation, trustfulness, and unflinching firmness."[63] Reality proved otherwise as violent attacks by the Ku Klux Klan increased throughout the South during 1870-71. In the spring of 1870, the Klan murdered a recently ordained preacher and local councilman from Lynch's district. In March 1871, a major riot erupted in Meridian, with buildings burned and several African Americans and a White judge killed. Specifically targeting Black Methodist pastor and state legislator J. Aaron Moore, the Klan milled about the church and later surrounded Moore's home. However, he evaded their search parties, eventually escaped to Jackson, and reported the atrocities to state authorities. When Lynch held a quarterly meeting in Meridian a few

[61] *Methodist Advocate*, February 16, 1870.
[62] Ibid., April 27, 1870.
[63] *Weekly Mississippi Pilot*, April 9, 1870.

weeks later, the "story of blood" troubled his soul, but publicly he urged a Christ-like response and exclaimed, "Our mission is to heal wounds, to preach peace[,] and to forgive!" As Methodist presiding elder, he underscored the importance of cultivating good will, overlooking wrongs, and forbearing revenge, but as secretary of state, he counseled African Americans to "demand protection" and "throw yourselves on the majesty of the law." Although Lynch's advice to "trust in the Lord" until the storm passed struck the right religious chord, Congress viewed the lawlessness in Meridian and other places as evidence that federal intervention was necessary to protect African Americans and passed the Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871 in response.[64]

Mississippi's failure to suppress Klan activity did not detract from Lynch's ability to discharge his duties as secretary of state and proved wrong any who doubted that African Americans were competent to hold office. He directed two major initiatives—keeping accurate accounts of public lands, which had gone unreported for almost two decades, and developing a nascent public school system. Despite these successes, his optimism wavered, and he admitted that the legal achievements of Black citizenship and suffrage had not changed the hearts and minds of many Whites. "We stand face to face with a merciless army of shrewd, persistent men who are seeking to use our weak and dependent condition for their personal benefit," he asserted unequivocally. In particular, he perceived that the sharecropping system and subsequent reliance on credit were economic barriers that hindered African Americans from improving their standard of living. Mores had not changed either. Even as a state officeholder he faced racial discrimination and was removed from a passenger train for sitting in a car reserved for Whites.[65]

The Church—Always Foremost in his Affections

Despite diminished expectations about the extent of change that politics could deliver, as 1871 closed Lynch still envisioned the Methodist church as an integral force helping to improve the lives of African Americans. "Every step in the history of our Church in the re-

[64] *Methodist Advocate*, May 25, 1870, March 29, April 19, May 3, 1871; Harris, *Day of the Carpetbagger*, 395-99.
[65] Harris, "James Lynch," 49-57; *Methodist Advocate*, January 10, 1872; *Zion's Herald*, April 25, 1872.

constructed South," he claimed, "marks it as God's chosen instrumentality to aid the colored people in working out their temporal and spiritual salvation." Notwithstanding the numerical growth of the MEC, he still could not shake the lingering misgivings about the prudence of his political engagement and felt compelled to defend his course. "It may be that my active participation in politics renders me less adapted to the ministry—of this my brethren must judge."[66] He knew perfectly well that some Methodists frowned upon politically active ministers. One writer had solicited the aid of "educated, disciplined, large-hearted, and deeply pious" northern Blacks "who would keep out of politics" to join the work in Mississippi, an obvious repudiation of his course.[67] Also aware that preacher-politicians faced greater threats and likely even endangered the lives of their congregations, he had told church members in Meridian that he would seek a minister "who has never been connected with politics in any way" to replace Moore.[68] Nevertheless, he assuaged his misgivings with the thought that "God has owned my labors," political and religious. However, he regarded his ministerial vocation as his true calling. "I must work in and for the Church," he related with much sincerity, for "my very salvation depends on it. I would no sooner sever my relationship with the Methodist Episcopal Church than my limbs from my body."[69]

As a delegate to the Methodist General Conference in Brooklyn in May 1872, he demonstrated the fervency of his anti-caste convictions on a national stage. When some participants moved to create an all-Black conference in Georgia, he delivered "a forcible speech" that helped defeat the proposal.[70] After both White and Black delegates suggested that the failure to select an African American as bishop over southern conferences would prove detrimental, Lynch maintained that qualifications alone should determine who held a bishopric. "Let these delegates go home and assure their members that beyond a doubt the Methodist Episcopal Church makes no distinction on account of race or color," he exclaimed to hearty applause.[71] An admirer speculated that he might have genuinely sought such a position, but his "political

[66] *Methodist Advocate*, December 20, 1871.
[67] Ibid., December 21, 1870.
[68] Ibid., May 3, 1871.
[69] Ibid., December 20, 1871.
[70] *Zion's Herald*, June 13, 1872.
[71] *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 31, 1872; *Methodist Advocate*, June 12, 1872.

entanglements" likely precluded him receiving serious consideration despite the "almost unanimous endorsement" of his views. If he did desire the post, he showed no sign of disappointment but expressed confidence that a Black man would hold a MEC bishopric in the near future.[72]

Politics: From Apex to Nadir

The church may have meant more to him personally than politics, but his contributions to the latter brought him more accolades and national attention, especially during a presidential election. As a delegate to the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on June 5-6, 1872, he put his oratorical skills on full display.

> "I heard gentlemen say here that we would kill the Democratic party. With all due deference to those who have superior political sagacity and knowledge to that which I possess, I beg leave to suggest that the Democratic party is dead. [Laughter.] Some may ask, then, why fulminate against it from the platform? Why resolve against it? Why invoke the Divine Master to retard its progress? Because a dead body lying on the ground in the summer time may do more harm than a living one. [Roars of laughter.] I behold this Democratic party dead. . . . We propose to turn out next November in the State of Mississippi, with the colored citizens all over our broad land, . . . and dig a grave for this corpse, so deep and so wide, and bury it so that it will never more be resuscitated."

Having entertained his audience, he reiterated the principles that he had been preaching in Mississippi for the past five years. Since the economic interests of Blacks and Whites were inextricably mixed, he had sought "peace and harmony" between them. Freedmen did not desire special treatment or privileges, he claimed, and would make any compromises necessary short of sacrificing their "political equality." However, a denial of this right repudiated all that the Civil War

[72] *New Orleans Weekly Louisianian*, January 4, 1873.

had accomplished. "We mean to walk in the pathway hewn out by the sword," he affirmed. He insisted that Ulysses S. Grant, not the Liberal Republican nominee Horace Greeley, "was imprinted in [freedmen's] hearts and memories" and would earn their votes.[73] Despite having his remarks misrepresented in the southern press and feeling compelled to deny that he had "rejoiced over the poverty of the South," he continued to show goodwill toward southerners in a speech in Brooklyn after the convention closed. After claiming that only unreconstructed Democrats would ever support Greeley's candidacy, he declared that most White Mississippians were loyal to the government and even supported the Ku Klux Klan Act.[74]

After basking in national limelight, he returned to Mississippi and sought the party's nomination to Congress from the fifth district. However, the high admiration he found among Methodist integrationists and most African Americans was not reciprocated by all at home. A few White carpetbaggers and some jealous Black men, who considered him a threat to their own ambitions, schemed to destroy him politically. Signs of declining health from untreated physical maladies and exhaustion from too much work and travel played into the hands of his opponents, who continued to depict him as inebriated. At a meeting in Jackson to choose delegates, a fight broke out over who should chair the proceedings. U.S. district attorney Eugene P. Jacobson allegedly punched Henry Pease in the mouth, who instead of turning the other cheek, grabbed his assailant's throat "and choked him severely." Supporters of each candidate brandished sticks and pistols, and the police came to restore order. During the hullabaloo, Lynch was purportedly "too drunk to appreciate the chaotic condition of affairs . . . [and] staggered about in a hopelessly muddled condition."[75] Another account alleged that Lynch "got very sick and left the Hall, vomiting on the floor as he went. Some Democrats present were mean enough to say he was drunk on mean whisky, while his friends positively knew he had not taken a drink during the day . . . and that he only *reeled* under excitement."[76]

---

[73] *Presidential Election, 1872: Proceedings of the National Union Republican Convention, Held at Philadelphia, June 5 and 6, 1872* (Washington, D.C.: Gibson, 1872), 33-34.
[74] *Weekly Clarion*, June 13, December 26, 1872; *New York Times*, June 22, 1872.
[75] *Memphis Sunday Appeal*, July 21, 1872.
[76] *Weekly Clarion*, July 25, 1872; Harris, "James Lynch," 57-58. Harris writes that accounts of Lynch's "affinity for hard liquor were beginning to have a damaging effect on his reputation within the black community and especially among influential ministers"

The character assassination culminated when Lynch was charged with attempted rape and put on trial at the end of July. The teenaged accuser Georgiana Morman, described as "nearly white and well developed," was staying overnight at the Lynch's home while her mother was out of town. According to the girl's testimony, when Lynch came to wake up his children in the morning, he "layed [sic] across her" while reaching across the bed to rouse his son. After chasing his son out of the room "with a switch," he returned in a few minutes and found her sitting on the floor, still wearing her nightgown but "putting on her shoes." Lynch remarked that she looked consumptive, then "put his hands on her shoulders and let them slip down on her breast." He testified that when he returned from shaving he "took her by the shoulders," told her to tidy up because she "looked like a consumptive," and denied ever touching her "with lustful thought or intent."[77] Once testimony revealed that the case hinged on a he-said-she-said, Lynch's acquittal by the mixed jury was assured. Spectators cheered his release, and Ethelbert Barksdale later quipped that he anticipated the result since "the girl's testimony [turned out] to be nothing more than a little extra fondling, if that."[78] Lynch's supporters claimed that "the whole affair is proven to be a conspiracy to defeat [his] prospects for Congress" and indicted Radical Republicans Henry Pease and C. F. Norris, both longstanding antagonists, as instigators. During the trial William F. Fitzgerald, a lawyer for the prosecution, publicly withdrew his services because his "sense of honor would not permit him to proceed further in a case where the evidence of conspiracy and persecution was so palpable."[79]

Whether Radical ploy or actual incident of sexual misconduct, Lynch's intended public humiliation did little to diminish his support among African Americans. One correspondent claimed that it actual-

---

who previously had backed him. He lists the politically conservative, former Confederate officer William H. Hardy as his sole source, who nearly thirty years after Lynch's death recklessly claimed, "[Lynch] drank to excess, and his influence over the better looking class of young negro women, lead [sic] him into forbidden paths and excesses, that cut short his life." See "Recollections of Reconstruction in East and Southeast Mississippi," *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society* 4 (1901): 127. I have not found any evidence of ministers accusing Lynch of drunkenness, which would have disqualified him from Methodist ministry. Since all the allegations came from Democratic sources or his political enemies, it is nigh impossible to determine whether or not an account was truthful or merely baseless character assassination.

[77] *Weekly Clarion*, August 1, 1872.

[78] *Semi-Weekly Clarion*, August 2, 1872.

[79] *Canton (Miss.) American Citizen*, August 3, 1872; Harris, "James Lynch," 58.

ly increased his popularity. However, he evidently campaigned very little for the congressional seat, in contrast to the incumbent George C. McKee, a Union Army veteran from Illinois who settled in Vicksburg after the war, who secured the nomination at the state convention shortly after the trial. Lynch's camp alleged that Radicals had bribed delegates to get the necessary votes to defeat him, but he dutifully supported McKee's candidacy and rebuffed entreaties to run against him under the Greeley banner.[80]

With his bid for Congress frustrated, Lynch directed his energies toward Grant's reelection. Still mindful of his influence among Blacks, the Democratic press twisted his remarks into statements that repudiated his well-known political principles. In a Jasper County speech that likely contained recycled statements from his address at the Republican convention, an eyewitness reported that Lynch announced the death of the Democratic Party and compared Horace Greeley to Judas. He even predicted that Greeley would not live out the year, a strange statement that proved prophetic as the editor died less than a month after the election. The reporter also claimed that Lynch stirred up racial hostility and "advocat[ed] revolution and bloodshed," a declaration uncharacteristic of Lynch's integrationist and cooperationist philosophy. If Lynch repeated the phrase "we mean to walk in the pathway hewn out by the sword" or uttered something similar, an unsympathetic listener could easily misconstrue or willfully twist it. Editor Barksdale certainly used the account for political grist and charged Lynch with advocating "a war of races" and "diabolically hint[ing] at the assassination of Mr. Greeley in the event of his election."[81] With most Democrats likely accepting the veracity of Lynch's public intoxication, it became convenient to chalk up his speeches to predominantly Black audiences as just another instance of Lynch being "drunk and say[ing] some very naughty things," which Democrats again claimed during the fall campaign.[82]

Republicans, in contrast, viewed Lynch's accomplishments as evidence of Reconstruction's achievements and enlisted him to stump

[80] *Memphis Daily Appeal*, August 2, 1872; *Weekly Louisianian*, August 17, 1872; *Weekly Clarion*, August 8, September 5, 1872; *New National Era*, August 29, 1872; Harris, *Day of the Carpetbagger*, 457; Harris, "James Lynch," 58-59. Harris maintains that the trial harmed Lynch and cost him support among Blacks.
[81] *Weekly Clarion*, October 10, 1872.
[82] *Semi-Weekly Clarion*, October 25, 1872.

for Grant in Indiana. Barnstorming five cities over the first five days of October, in Indianapolis he joined Treasury Secretary George S. Boutwell, former Union general and Radical congressman Benjamin F. Butler, former senator Benjamin Wade, and future Supreme Court justice John Marshall Harlan for a mass meeting and grand procession. "Thousands of footmen and horsemen bearing torches and scores of wagons fully illuminated" representing the city's trades and professions paraded down Washington Street as fireworks exploded along the route. A similar spectacle greeted Lynch in Terre Haute, and hundreds of people could not get within earshot to hear him (and Boutwell) rally the faithful. Afterwards an enthusiastic attendant gushed over Lynch's "herculean efforts" for Indiana Republicans that earned him "stunning ovation[s]" throughout the tour.[83]

A Meteoric Career

Tragedy struck shortly after he returned to Mississippi. Lynch had been ill for some time, suffering from a kidney ailment, which he had "neglected" to treat. In late November or early December, having become too ill to work, he finally summoned a doctor, who diagnosed the malady as Bright's disease (nephritis). A bronchial infection that developed during the presidential campaign further weakened him, and on December 18, 1872, he died at home, surrounded by his family. Cut down in his prime at the age of thirty-three, Lynch's death, though "not entirely unexpected," caused an outpouring of grief among Jackson's African American community. Four days later, "from early morning until the close of the funeral ceremonies in the afternoon, a continuous line of men, women, and children," predominantly African Americans but also many elected officials and "the best and most respectable white citizens," paid their last respects as his body lay in state.[84] Lynch was buried in the Greenwood Cemetery in Jackson, the most prestigious in the city, and his monument features an engraving of his face.

[83] *Indianapolis Evening Journal*, September 24, 26, 28, October 5, 1872; *New York Times*, October 4, 1872; *New National Era*, October 17, 1872; Harris, "James Lynch," 59-60.
[84] *Christian Advocate*, January 9, 1873; *New National Era*, January 2, 1873; *Weekly Louisianian*, January 4, 1873.

Scholars of Methodism have long noted that the MEC as an institution gave nearly unanimous support for the policies that characterized Radical Reconstruction. By aligning himself with the MEC and serving as a presiding elder in Mississippi, James Lynch cast his lot with the only institution focused on "dotting the South with temples, where white and black can meet as equals around God's altar." He left a comfortable position in the North as editor and pastor within the AME denomination to risk his life on the frontlines of battle to pursue what Reginald Hildebrand called an "immediatist, perfectionist integrationism." A little more than a year before making this leap, Lynch had met Frederick Douglass in Boston and may have been spurred on to action by conversing with the illustrious orator. "'Your modern Christianity is too sheepish for me,'" Douglass had chided, and Lynch reflexively recoiled at this remark. Although time and experience showed that Douglass was right about the conservative nature of America's churches, the very notion of attempting to establish "a visionary, biracial, anticaste denomination in the South" only a few years after the end of slavery marked Lynch and his companions as religious revolutionaries.[85]

Yet shortly after Lynch's death, his AME friend Benjamin Tanner depicted him not as a radical sectarian but as a broadminded "conservative," meaning that, although a Mississippi Republican, he had pursued a national agenda, and, although a Methodist, he had sought to further Christianity more than anything else. Tanner also interpreted Lynch's life as a warning about the perils of mingling religion and politics. Tanner recalled a conversation shortly after his friend's election to public office: "With a sigh, Mr. Lynch remarked, 'Ah, Tanner, I would that I were as I once was, only a humble minister of Christ!'" Lynch, however, reconciled these seemingly conflicting devotions with the conviction that God had brought about the Civil War to end slavery and to commence the legal, social, and racial transformation of the United States. This belief fueled his commitment to seeking a just and equitable society through both politics and the church. His few years of labor in the South demonstrated that he was engaged, as Gilbert

[85] William Warren Sweet, "The Methodist Episcopal Church and Reconstruction," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 7:3 (October 1914), 163; Ralph E. Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1956), 209-11; *New Orleans Advocate*, November 2, 1867; Hildebrand, *Times Were Strange and Stirring*, 100, 118; *Zion's Herald*, April 22, 1869.

Haven wrote about him, in "a great work, not for a 'race,' as he speaks, but for the only race, the human race."[86]

[86] *Methodist Advocate*, January 8, 1873; *Zion's Herald*, April 22, 1869. See Paul William Harris, *A Long Reconstruction: Racial Caste and Reconciliation in the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), for the larger story of how the MEC continued to wrestle with the issue of race in its denomination.

Building Grassroots Politics: The Roots and Rise of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, 1961-1964

by Justin Martin

On August 1, 1964, more than thirty Black Mississippians — sharecroppers, teachers, small business owners, and organizers — gathered at the first Sunflower County Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) Convention in Indianola, Mississippi.[1] Charles McLaurin, a young project director for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) made the significance of that night clear: "This is the first time that most of us are participating in politics" and "[y]ou've assembled because you are interested in shaping a far greater nation than we have at the present." McLaurin proudly reminded them, "You are making history."[2] Less than a week later, delegates from counties across the state gathered at the MFDP's first state convention. In Jackson, they codified a grassroots political and economic agenda to reshape their lives and their state. Black Mississippians and their activist allies had assembled the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, a statewide, Black-led political party with local movement centers and Black leaders as its base. With the founding of the party, they inverted the power dynamic that had characterized Black political life in Mississippi since Reconstruction.

The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party's rise was anything but certain. In 1962, only about 1 percent of eligible Black Mississippians were registered to vote.[3] Young SNCC organizers who hoped to

[1] Minutes of "Sunflower County Meeting," August 1, 1964, "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Files on Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party," Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972; Appendix A. Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party Papers, 1961-1972 (hereafter MFDP Papers), 1969, https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee-files/docview/2578769226/se-2.

[2] Ibid.

[3] "Civil Rights '63: 1963 Report of the United States Commission on Civil Rights" (Washington, DC, 1963), Historical Publications of the United States Commission on Civil Rights, Thurgood Marshall Law Library, https://www2.law.umaryland.edu/mar-

JUSTIN MARTIN is a law student at George Washington University Law School. He earned a master's degree in history and two bachelor's degrees in political science and African & African American Studies from Louisiana State University.

reinvigorate Mississippi's civil rights struggle witnessed discriminatory applications of voting qualifications, economic intimidation, and violence that all but ensured the racial and political status quo.[4] Despite these obstacles, throughout 1962 and 1963, SNCC's voter registration and political education efforts under the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) nourished Black leadership and local movement centers across Mississippi. COFO's independent organizing ethos and efforts such as the 1963 Freedom Vote, a statewide mock election, created an independent strain of empowering electoral politics that challenged the state's regressive all-White politics. This independent political tradition culminated in the founding of the Freedom Democratic Party in April 1964. Over the next three months, the massive organizing expansion of the 1964 Freedom Summer gave the party the initial boost it needed to build its network of party organizations across more than thirty counties and to launch its ambitious long-term platform. These efforts provided a glimpse of political power to a new generation of Black Mississippians, a tangible vehicle to attain that power, and left an impact that outlasted the summer of 1964 and even the party's challenge to be seated at the Democratic National Convention in August 1964 in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

Despite the scale and significance of the MFDP's 1964 summer of organizing, it has been overshadowed by the party's Democratic National Convention seating challenge. Even John Dittmer's magisterial grassroots history *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* omits much of the party's organizing during the summer of 1964.[5] Scholarship that does survey the MFDP's summer of organizing devotes significantly more attention to summer project volunteers than to the equally significant but lesser-known indigenous leaders in communities across the state.[6] Although more recent works like Wesley Hogan's *Many Minds, One Heart* and Lisa Anderson Todd's *For a Voice and the Vote* offer glimpses of the MFDP's unique political

shall/usccr/documents/cr11963a.pdf, 34.

[4] Ibid., 22; Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 116-126, 162-164.

[5] John Dittmer, "11. That Summer" in *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 242-271.

[6] Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 77, 78, 80-82; Bruce Watson, *Freedom Summer: The Savage Season of 1964 That Made Mississippi Burn and Made America a Democracy* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 174-176, 189-190, 238-239.

culture, both works ultimately pivot to a more traditional investigation of the party's link to the summer project volunteers.[7] Likewise, Clayborne Carson's *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* acknowledges the ultimate goal of the MFDP as an independent institution run by local leaders, but omits much of the local indigenous leadership in 1964 that demonstrates this point.[8] Though the MFDP did have roots in SNCC's organizing efforts, by August 1964 the MFDP also had its own local party organizations across the state.[9] In addition, the MFDP's detailed party platform showcased independent political ambitions beyond the summer project, the Democratic National Convention, and 1964. This article untangles the roots of the MFDP, profiles the Black Mississippians who made its rise possible, and recovers the expansive political platform that signaled the party's long-term ambitions to reshape Mississippi.

The Roots of the MFDP

In 1961, a new generation of activists affiliated with SNCC began organizing in Mississippi to register Black voters and organize indigenous Black leadership in the state. SNCC first became famous in Mississippi for its involvement in the 1961 Freedom Rides campaign, when it partnered with activists from the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) to send racially integrated groups of travelers on interstate bus routes across the Deep South.[10] Word of the Freedom Rides spread across the state, but SNCC's popularity meant something different among Whites and Blacks in the state. White Mississippians remembered the campaign as a northern invasion of "outside agitators."[11] Mississippi Senator John C. Stennis promised to outlaw future freedom

[7] Wesley C. Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart : SNCC's Dream for a New America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 145-157; Lisa Anderson Todd, *For a Voice and the Vote: My Journey with the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party* (University Press of Kentucky, 2014), http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt12880d4.
[8] Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 108-111.
[9] Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 322-323.
[10] Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*, Pivotal Moments in American History (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 255-257, 265-269; Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, Second Printing edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 36-38.
[11] David R. Davies, *The Press and Race: Mississippi Journalists Confront the Movement* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 91-93, 113; Dittmer, *Local People*, 97-98.

rides by legislation.[12] Alternatively, at least some Black Mississippians viewed the campaign as a needed shock to the state's rigid system of White supremacy.[13] When SNCC organizers entered the state in greater numbers in the years after the Freedom Rides, Black Mississippians often called them "freedom riders" regardless of the type of work they took on.[14]

By 1963, SNCC organizing and local Black leadership had led to the growth of local movement centers across Mississippi, including in centers of White power such as Sunflower County. Sunflower County was home to shotgun-wielding "night riders" and newer groups like the Citizens Council that practiced a seemingly genteel White supremacy.[15] The Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling and fears of Black empowerment served as the mobilizing targets for Whites in Sunflower.[16] The Citizens Council movement began in Indianola in Sunflower County in 1954 as a counter-revolutionary response to *Brown* and rapidly spawned chapters across the South.[17] Citizens Councils allowed middle and upper-class White leaders to deploy economic and political coercion to defend White supremacy and deter Black advancement.[18] Because they claimed not to employ violence, they tended not to attract the attention of the federal government. From Sunflower County to the U.S. Senate, White supremacy in Mississippi had deep wells of support. When arch-segregationist Senator James O. Eastland was not battling civil rights legislation in the U.S. Senate, he managed his family's massive cotton plantation in Sunflow-

[12] "Stennis Bill Would Outlaw Freedom Riders," *Sun Herald*, May 24, 1961.
[13] Dittmer, *Local People*, 97-99; J. Todd Moye, *Let the People Decide: Black Freedom and White Resistance Movements in Sunflower County, Mississippi, 1945-1986*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 89-90; Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 145-146.
[14] Dittmer, *Local People*, 97; Mary King, *Freedom Song: A Personal Story of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement* (New York, NY: William Morrow & Co., 1987), 402-403; Howell Raines, *My Soul Is Rested: Movement Days in the Deep South Remembered* (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 246.
[15] Chris Myers Asch, *The Senator and the Sharecropper: The Freedom Struggles of James O. Eastland and Fannie Lou Hamer* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/12/monograph/book/21183, 151; Moye, *Let the People Decide*, 68-70, 101-103.
[16] Moye, *Let the People Decide*, 32-33.
[17] Neil McMillen, *The Citizens' Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction, 1954-64* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 19-21, 25-30, 41-46, 59-63, 74-76, 81-84; Moye, *Let the People Decide*, 25; Rolph, Stephanie R. Rolph, "Nurtured in Fear, 1954-1957" in *Resisting Equality: The Citizens' Council, 1954-1989* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2018), 31-68.
[18] Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 34-35.

er County.[19] Indeed, Sunflower County was an unlikely place for movement leadership to emerge.

Despite the omnipresent danger of violence and retaliation against organizers and leaders, movement centers in places such as Sunflower County grew because local people were eager to attain their rights and exercise their power. The city of Ruleville, for example, where a team of Black leaders formed the promising Sunflower County Movement, had been a base of SNCC operations since 1962. Rebecca McDonald and her husband Joe were among those locals who vouched for SNCC organizers and pushed neighbors and leaders of the Williams Chapel Missionary Baptist Church to integrate them into the community.[20] Almost immediately, Whites fought back. In September 1962, Ruleville Mayor Charles M. Dorrough cut off Williams Chapel's free water and tax-exempt status because of its association with civil rights activities.[21] Church deacons quickly capitulated and closed the church to voter registration activities, but momentum picked up in the winter of 1962-1963 when Rebecca McDonald forced Williams Chapel to reopen to SNCC's voter registration workshops.[22] Irene Johnson, another early leader, articulated the drive and agency of locals during a mass meeting at the church. While Whites claimed that Black residents did not want to vote, Johnson argued that local movement leaders should take potential Black voters to register to show that "it was them that wanted to register to vote."[23] Once voter education workshops restarted at the church, Joe McDonald began to lead the meetings and shepherd local community members to the courthouse to register to vote.[24] By July 1963, at least 600 Black residents of Ruleville had attempted to register, with some taking as many as fifteen trips to the courthouse in an effort to outwit the clerks withholding the franchise.[25]

[19] Asch, *The Senator and the Sharecropper*, 157-159; Moye, *Let the People Decide*, 18-21.
[20] Moye, *Let the People Decide*, 92-95, 108.
[21] Moye, *Let the People Decide*, 101-102; Ruleville, Mississippi: A Background Report, 1964, Civil Rights Movement Archive, https://www.crmvet.org/docs/640600_sncc_ruleville.pdf.
[22] Moye, *Let the People Decide*, 108.
[23] "Stokely Carmichael, Charlie Cobb, and Courtland Cox Discuss the Philosophy of SNCC ; Part 3," The WFMT Studs Terkel Radio Archive, accessed March 23, 2023, https://studsterkel.wfmt.com/programs/stokely-carmichael-charlie-cobb-and-courtland-cox-discuss-philosophy-sncc-part-3.
[24] Moye, *Let the People Decide*, 133.
[25] Moye, *Let the People Decide*, 108.

Movement centers were powerful, but statewide coordination was necessary to achieve results beyond registering a small number of voters. On October 7, 1963, the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), Mississippi's civil rights network that included SNCC, launched a statewide mock election dubbed the Freedom Vote.[26] The Freedom Vote featured two statewide candidates and had an ambitious policy platform.[27] There were two candidates — one Black, NAACP and COFO activist Aaron Henry, and one White, activist and minister Ed King — who ran for governor and lieutenant governor, respectively. This duo was likely the first attempt at a biracial gubernatorial ticket since Reconstruction. Their platform included sections on voting rights, fair trial by jury, fair employment, and an integrated, well-funded school system open to all.[28]

The Freedom Vote was an unofficial vote, but COFO's rhetoric and strategy anticipated the power of an independent Black electoral base in Mississippi.[29] Freedom Vote press releases highlighted the fact that the freedom candidates were raising issues not addressed by the Democratic or Republican parties of Mississippi.[30] They designed their campaign with "four major issues – justice, education, economics, and voting rights."[31] At a Freedom Vote rally in Jackson, Mississippi, organizer Allard K. Lowenstein told the crowd, "The two-party system's coming to Mississippi because Aaron Henry's on the ballot, running in the hearts of the people of this state. That's your two-party system!"[32] Campaign materials also anticipated this shift. A 1963 flyer encour-

[26] William H. Lawson, *No Small Thing: The 1963 Mississippi Freedom Vote*, 1st edition (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2018), 50-51; SNCC Press Release: COFO Maps Vote Fight: Henry 'Runs' For Governor, October 7, 1963, Civil Rights Movement Archive, https://www.crmvet.org/docs/pr/631007_sncc_pr_cofomapsvote.pdf.
[27] SNCC Press Release: Two Run in Mississippi Freedom Vote, October 1963, Civil Rights Movement Archive, https://www.crmvet.org/docs/631000_sncc_pr_tworun.pdf; Freedom Ballot Governor's Race Platform, 1963, Civil Rights Movement Archive, https://www.crmvet.org/docs/631100_fb_platform.pdf.
[28] Freedom Candidates and Freedom Ballot Flyer, November 1963, Civil Rights Movement Archive, https://www.crmvet.org/docs/6311_cofo_freedomballot.pdf.
[29] Joseph A. Sinsheimer, "The Freedom Vote of 1963: New Strategies of Racial Protest in Mississippi," *The Journal of Southern History* 55, no. 2 (1989): 244, https://doi.org/10.2307/2208903.
[30] Lawson, *No Small Thing*, 103-104, 132.
[31] SNCC Press Release: Henry-King Campaign Raises 'Real Issues', October 1963, Civil Rights Movement Archive, https://www.crmvet.org/docs/pr/631000_sncc_pr_henry-king-campaign.pdf, "SNCC Press Release: Two Run in Mississippi Freedom Vote," October 1963, https://www.crmvet.org/docs/631000_sncc_pr_tworun.pdf.
[32] "Moses Moon Civil Rights Movement Audio Collection | Jackson, MS; Fall/Winter 1963 - Mass Meeting | SOVA,", https://sova.si.edu/details/NMAH.AC.0556?t=W#ref85.

aged registered voters to write in the names of the Freedom Vote candidates on their official ballot and to "not vote for the Democrats or the Republicans . . . vote for freedom."[33] To further this contrast and illustrate the Freedom Vote's role as a bridge to electoral politics, the 1963 Freedom Vote ballot listed both the official election candidates and the Freedom Vote candidates side by side.[34]

The Freedom Vote was a radical democratic effort and its political education program of flyers, pamphlets, posters, and rallies reached twenty cities across Mississippi.[35] It linked movement centers into a statewide network that could advertise, organize, and run candidates for office on an independent platform.[36] Black Mississippians learned about politics, saw their interests represented in a political platform, and most importantly, many voted for the first time. In Sunflower County, Joe McDonald, who had his name purged from the city voting rolls and his house fired into for housing SNCC workers, was one of thousands of Black Mississippians who voted for Aaron Henry for governor.[37] McDonald was not alone; Black Mississippians cast over 70,000 "freedom votes" for these independent candidates and their unique platform.[38] The vote demonstrated that Black Mississippians would indeed vote if given the opportunity, and it gave them an alternative to the political status quo. Despite the success of the Freedom Vote, an unofficial election could not implement the policies that Black Mississippians sought. Still, the Freedom Vote illustrated the potential of a statewide organization and campaign.

---

[33] Freedom Candidates, Freedom Ballot flyer, November 1963, Civil Rights Movement Archive, https://www.crmvet.org/docs/6311_cofo_freedomballot.pdf.
[34] Freedom Vote sample ballot November 3, 1963 election," n.d., Civil Rights Movement Archive, https://www.crmvet.org/docs/631103_cofo_ballot.pdf.
[35] SNCC Press Release: COFO Maps Vote Fight: Henry 'Runs' For Governor, October 7, 1963, Civil Rights Movement Archive, https://www.crmvet.org/docs/pr/631007_sncc_pr_cofomapsvote.pdf.
[36] John Dittmer, George C. Wright, and W. Marvin Dulaney, *Essays on the American Civil Rights Movement* (Texas A&M University Press, 1993), 13; Sinsheimer, "The Freedom Vote of 1963: New Strategies of Racial Protest in Mississippi," 243-244.
[37] "Mississippi Free Press; Vol. 2 No. 19," April 20, 1963, Historical Society Library, Microforms Room, Micro film P70-964; Pamphlet Collection 10-1224 Super oversize, Freedom Summer Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/p15932coll2/id/59949.
[38] "The Student Voice; Vol. 4 No. 4," November 11, 1963, The Student voice; Historical Society Library Microforms Room, N82-521; Freedom Summer Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/p15932coll2/id/50136.

Freedom Summer and the Rise of the MFDP

In April 1964, less than six months after the Freedom Vote, COFO activists founded the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) as part of a larger mobilization for the summer of 1964.[39] The mobilization that COFO envisioned for the Mississippi Summer Project would bring hundreds of northern volunteers, many of them White, into Mississippi during the summer of 1964 to expand COFO's network of projects across the state.[40] The summer project included Freedom Schools and community centers to provide educational and creative opportunities to Black children and adults, a 1964 Freedom Vote, and the MFDP to provide a political party for Black Mississippians.[41]

The Freedom Summer mobilization expanded COFO's network, which proved essential to the MFDP's work. COFO offices statewide functioned as centers of record keeping and communication that helped the MFDP to disseminate materials and organize its operations across the state. Many of the 70,000 Mississippians who participated in the 1963 Freedom Vote took their next step into the movement by participating in the MFDP. Local movement leaders such as Irene Johnson and the McDonalds took roles in the MFDP and used the party as a new vehicle for political empowerment. Although the structure created by COFO was important to the MFDP, the party took the grassroots ethos that underlay the COFO network even further.

The MFDP was one among several summer project initiatives, but the party had the unique potential to unify Black political activity by building an independent Black political agenda atop COFO's growing statewide network. Accordingly, each facet of the summer project supported the MFDP's organizing. The community centers often served as meeting locations for precinct and county-level MFDP conventions and Freedom Schools, while the 1964 Freedom Vote and voter registration efforts served more expansive roles in the MFDP's organizing.

The 1964 Freedom Vote served an essential function as the venue for the MFDP to run its candidates for the November 1964 election in Mississippi. MFDP candidates were barred from running in Mississippi's official 1964 election in November, but in the Freedom

[39] Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 321; Dittmer, *Local People*, 237.
[40] Dittmer, *Local People*, 128; McAdam, *Freedom Summer*, 4.
[41] McAdam, *Freedom Summer*, 77-86; Watson, *Freedom Summer*, 66.

Vote held in the same month, candidates generated enthusiasm among potential Black voters and support for the party.[42] Summer volunteers assigned to the Freedom Vote supported the party's efforts through door-to-door canvassing that "freedom registered" potential voters and spread the word about the MFDP.

Freedom Vote candidates for Congress and the U.S. Senate raised attention for the party's efforts, too. In 1964, the Freedom Vote featured Fannie Lou Hamer from Ruleville, Annie Devine from Canton, and Victoria Gray from Hattiesburg — all running for the U.S. House of Representatives — and Aaron Henry from Clarksdale running for the U.S. Senate.[43] The candidates themselves represented a cross-section of Black Mississippi, with Hamer, a sharecropper; Gray, a former teacher and mother of three; Devine, a former teacher and businesswomen; and Henry, a pharmacist.[44] While local newspapers and Whites in Mississippi generally took a neutral or negative stance towards the 1964 Freedom Vote, national outlets like *The Associated Press*, *Time,* and *The New York Times* covered the vote more positively and raised awareness of the MFDP's efforts.[45]

---

[42] Dittmer, *Local People*, 322; Lawson, *No Small Thing*, 165.

[43] "Freedom Means Vote for Fannie Lou Hamer," Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party Campaign Posters Collection, Digital Collections, University of Southern Mississippi, https://usm.access.preservica.com/uncategorized/IO_d0805e3d-1ba2-427f-9ee2-23d0c3aa9920/.

[44] "Candidate Biography: Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer," n.d., "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Campaign Materials, Memoranda, Newsletters, and Press Releases," Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972; Freedom Vote, 1963-1964, 1963, https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee/docview/2578728740/se-2; "Candidate Biography: Mrs. Victoria Jackson Gray," n.d., "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Campaign Materials, Memoranda, Newsletters, and Press Releases," Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972; Freedom Vote, 1963-1964, 1963, https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee/docview/2578728740/se-2; "Candidate Biography: Mrs. Annie Devine," n.d., "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Campaign Materials, Memoranda, Newsletters, and Press Releases," Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972; Freedom Vote, 1963-1964, 1963, https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee/docview/2578728740/se-2; "Candidate Biography: Aaron Henry," n.d., "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Campaign Materials, Memoranda, Newsletters, and Press Releases," Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972; Freedom Vote, 1963-1964, 1963, https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee/docview/2578728740/se-2.

[45] Dittmer, *Local People*, 323-324; Lawson, *No Small Thing*, 166; Mike Smith, "Freedom Democrats To Enter Campaign," *Clarion-Ledger*, September 20, 1964; "Johnson - Humphrey Win Big in FDP's Mock Election," *Hattiesburg American*, November 3, 1964; "Plane Buzzes SNCC Meeting At Indianola," *The Greenwood Commonwealth*, October 23, 1964; Charles B. Gordon, "13 Voter Drive Leaders Jailed," *Enterprise-Journal*, October 26, 1964.

Education in Freedom Schools politicized students, while students politicized their parents and neighbors by inviting them into the MFDP through door-to-door canvassing.[46] Although students across Mississippi canvassed to register their neighbors for the 1964 Freedom Vote, the responses they received were not always favorable.[47] Recounting a disappointing experience, one student postulated that "[p]robably she was accustomed to letting other people think or talk for her."[48] Another student quoted Black poet Melvin Tolson to chide an uncooperative neighbor, "Oh, how can we forget our human rights denied? . . . when freedom's gate is barred, oh, how can we forget?"[49] Other students found ways to convey the power of the right to vote and the MFDP. Bonnie Tidwell in Holly Springs reminded a resident, "Your one vote could make the person you vote for win by one vote, maybe even break a tie. If you did vote you could even say you have some voice in the government."[50]

In addition to canvassing, Freedom Schools across Mississippi published student newsletters that featured columns promoting the MFDP and its aims. Columns in Freedom School newspapers in Drew and Ruleville in the Delta, Meridian near the Alabama border, and Hattiesburg in the Piney Woods advertised upcoming MFDP conventions to readers.[51] Hattiesburg's *Student Voice of True Light* highlighted the fact that "there are Negroes in the South who really want to vote," while Greenwood's *Freedom Carrier* and Ruleville's *Freedom Fighter* both highlighted the ease of registering to vote for the MFDP.[52] Ruleville's *Freedom Fighter* reminded readers that they must "work for change . . . demand change . . . [and] demand freedom," before urging them to "Fill out a Freedom Form! Support the Freedom Democratic Party of Mississippi."[53]

A July 1964 MFDP initiative in Hattiesburg demonstrated

[46] Jon N. Hale, 2. "'There Was Something Happening': The Civil Rights Education and Politicization of the Freedom School Students" in *The Freedom Schools: Student Activists in the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement* (Columbia University Press, 2016), https://doi.org/10.7312/hale17568, 37-67.
[47] Jon Hale, *To Write in the Light of Freedom: The Newspapers of the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Schools* (University Press of Mississippi, 2015), 71, 112-114, 126; Hale, *The Freedom Schools*, 39.
[48] Hale, *To Write in the Light of Freedom*, 114.
[49] Hale, *To Write in the Light of Freedom*, 71-72.
[50] Hale, *To Write in the Light of Freedom*, 113.
[51] Hale, *To Write in the Light of Freedom*, 59-60, 190, 163, 79, 172.
[52] Hale, *To Write in the Light of Freedom*, 86, 63, 195.
[53] Hale, *To Write in the Light of Freedom*, 199.

a third important way that party organizers engaged with Freedom School students to politicize residents and promote the MFDP. A memo to all Freedom School volunteers near Hattiesburg requested that teachers host a "poster party" for students to make posters promoting the MFDP and its upcoming meetings.[54] Within days, an MFDP meeting advertisement and student appeal for support for the party appeared in Hattiesburg's *Student Voice of Light* newspaper.[55] The memo provided a list of sample messages for the posters and deadlines to ensure that posters were created and hung early enough to educate and organize for successful meetings. Importantly, the memo suggested that the MFDP's rhetoric still be honed at the grassroots. Although regional COFO offices and Freedom Summer projects served as key organizing infrastructure for the party, organizers exhorted students to use their creativity in developing political messages that resonated with their parents and neighbors.

In addition to assistance from COFO and Freedom Summer projects, the MFDP launched its own political education program in the summer of 1964. The political education program sought to: (1) raise the consciousness of Black Mississippians about their potential political power, (2) recruit them to participate in MFDP conventions, and (3) empower existing leaders and potential new leaders. The party's campaign of consciousness raising built heavily on experience from previous efforts such as the 1963 Freedom Vote, but in 1964 the MFDP aimed to prepare Black Mississippians to seize power beyond the vote.[56] This meant repurposing flyer and poster formats that had worked in 1963, while creating new formats, such as postcards and pamphlets to nurture and organize the MFDP's grassroots movement. These efforts took many different forms. The party used short-length media such as flyers, postcards, and posters, along with multi-paged media such as pamphlets. All the methods were intended to educate Black Mississippians on their rights, the state's history, and their nascent political power — while moving them from knowledge to action.

[54] "Memo to all teachers: poster party for MFDP instructions," July 1964, M323 Ellin (Joseph and Nancy) Freedom Summer Collection, Box 2, Folder 14, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries Special Collections, https://usm.access.preservica.com/uncategorized/IO_b78a0b21-3d84-4a81-87b6-769afed12e29.
[55] Hale, *To Write in the Light of Freedom*, 79.
[56] Lawson, "From Freedom Days to Federal Law" in *No Small Thing*, 147-170.

Flyers spread information about eminent activities such as convention meetings but often highlighted Black participation and leadership too. A Marshall County flyer delivered a nod to the community's existing leaders when it stated that the party was "started by people like yourself who felt that the all-White Democratic Party of Mississippi does not really represent the people of this state," but then offered the opportunity to raise up new leaders, when it stated that "[at the meeting] we will elect people to represent the people of Mississippi."[57] A flyer from the Sunflower County Freedom Democratic Party laid out the party's origins and noted that "People can support the Freedom Democratic Party by going to meetings that are held in their town. Everyone should go . . . It is OUR party."[58]

These same flyers highlighted the independence of "OUR party" while reinforcing the link between that independence and action by ordinary Black Mississippians. The Lafayette County flyer stated boldly that attendees could "tell President Johnson — and the entire country that Negroes in Mississippi want FREEDOM and the right to VOTE."[59] Both flyers closed by making the participatory nature of the MFDP's change clear, stating: "No change comes unless people work for change. We demand change. We demand freedom."[60]

The centering of Black leadership and empowerment was a key part of the MFDP's appeal, but the party also sought to reconcile this approach with its electoral ambitions and the role of Whites in the Movement. Although Mississippi Whites by and large did not participate either because of their White supremacist views or because of concerns about violence against the movement, the MFDP aimed to build a political coalition that included poor Whites, if only rhetorically. The same flyers that alluded to the Black-led MFDP also courted

[57] "The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party meets Monday Parker's School" Flyer, July 27, 1964, "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Marshall County Reports," MFDP Papers, 1965, https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee/docview/2578753309/se-2.
[58] Sunflower County FDP meeting flyer, 1964, Civil Rights Movement Archive, https://www.crmvet.org/docs/64_mfdp-flyer.pdf.
[59] Holmes County FDP Convention meeting flyer, 1964, Civil Rights Movement Archive, https://www.crmvet.org/docs/64_mfdp_holmes-flyer.pdf; "The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party of Lafayette Co.," Michael Lipsky and David J. Olson Papers, 1935-1981; Z: Accessions, M96-024, Box 1, Folder 1, Freedom Summer Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/p15932coll2/id/2728.
[60] Sunflower County FDP meeting flyer, 1964, Civil Rights Movement Archive, https://www.crmvet.org/docs/64_mfdp-flyer.pdf.

poor Whites as a part of its coalition. The Lafayette County flyer that touted the Black-led MFDP also mentioned its inclusive nature, stating that at the meeting residents would "elect people to represent the people of Mississippi (black people and poor whites)" and the Sunflower County MFDP advertised that the new party was for "both whites and negroes."[61] This was the antithesis of the Mississippi Democratic Party's all-White base.

Political education also included posters and postcards, which announced upcoming elections and candidates for the MFDP. Posters for the 1964 election cycle introduced voters to candidates Aaron Henry, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Victoria Gray.[62] Each poster appeared with a bold red background, the photo and name of the candidate profiled, and a list of the full MFDP slate at the bottom of the poster alongside the election dates. The message of the posters is clear enough, but two other considerations are important. The posters featured large pictures of other Black Mississippians running for significant political offices, and each poster featured the words "Freedom Means . . ." in bold lettering before completing the thought by asking the reader to "vote for . . ." each candidate. These posters echoed the novelty and power of independent Black candidates first seen in the 1963 Freedom Vote. However, unlike the 1963 Freedom Vote ticket, the MFDP's candidate slate was all-Black. The slate of candidates also featured three Black women as candidates for Congress, a stark change from the Mississippi Democratic Party's all-male ticket.

The MFDP added postcards to their organizing efforts, a tool not seen in the 1963 Freedom Vote, that introduced candidates while soliciting grassroots support. A set of postcards from the 1964 election cycle profiled MFDP candidates, such as Fannie Lou Hamer, John Cameron, and James Houston — all running for the U.S. House of Rep-

[61] "The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party of Lafayette Co.," Michael Lipsky and David J. Olson Papers, 1935-1981; Z: Accessions, M96-024, Box 1, Folder 1, Freedom Summer Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/p15932coll2/id/2728.

[62] "Freedom Means Vote for Fannie Lou Hamer", Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party Campaign Posters Collection, Digital Collections, University of Southern Mississippi, https://usm.access.preservica.com/uncategorized/IO_d0805e3d-1ba2-427f-9ee2-23d0c3aa9920/; "Freedom Means Vote for Aaron Henry", Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party Campaign Posters Collection, Digital Collections, University of Southern Mississippi, https://usm.access.preservica.com/uncategorized/IO_b32f684f-0389-4c8c-b666-1d5db527a9be/; "Freedom Means Vote for Victoria Gray," Political Campaign Posters, 1838-1986, Freedom Summer Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Image/IM97167.

resentatives and Victoria Gray running for the U.S. Senate.[63] The cards showcased the potential of Black leadership from across the state, but they also contained a different sign of the party's grassroots politics: a list of campaign "needs" including staff, speaking locations, campaign headquarters, and donations. Each postcard closed by reminding the reader that "The MOST IMPORTANT contribution you can make is to take your friends to the courthouse and register to vote for . . ."[64] The postcards emphasized the same local imitative, which leaders such as Irene Johnson advocated, while pooling resources to make independent Black candidacy possible across the state.

Tools such as flyers, posters, and pamphlets were innovative and powerful, but they were mere auxiliaries to the MFDP's main form of political action — the freedom convention. The MFDP's political conventions spread across more than thirty counties during the summer and fall of 1964 and mobilized Black Mississippians into a potent political force. The freedom conventions spanned the physical and organizational geography of Mississippi, from the Delta to the Piney Woods, from counties with a history of movement activity to those without. Yet one thing they had in common: all the conventions occurred in counties with extremely low levels of officially registered Black voters — a key to their empowering potential.[65] In a state with widespread discrimina-

[63] "Rev. John Cameron candidate for Congress," James M. Houston Papers, ca. 1937, 1955, 1962-1967; Archives Main Stacks, Mss 545, Box 1, Folder 3, Freedom Summer Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/p15932coll2/id/12657; Ibid, "Mrs. Victoria Gray candidate for Congress," Houston --Houston's Campaign for Congress, 1964 (James M. Houston Papers, ca. 1937, 1955, 1962-1967; Archives Main Stacks, Mss 545, Box 1, Folder 3), Freedom Summer Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/p15932coll2/id/10406; "Mr. James Houston candidate for Congress," Houston --Houston's Campaign for Congress, 1964 (James M. Houston Papers, ca. 1937, 1955, 1962-1967; Archives Main Stacks, Mss 545, Box 1, Folder 3), Freedom Summer Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/p15932coll2/id/10404, "Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer, candidate for Congress," Freedom Information Service records, 1962-1979; Micro 780, Reel 2, Segment 7, Part 1, Freedom Summer Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/p15932coll2/id/58170.

[64] Ibid.

[65] "Freedom Registration Report," September 1, 1964, "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Correspondence and Memoranda," Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972; Records of the Convention Challenge, 1960-1967, 1964, https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee/docview/2578728287/se-2.

A comparative analysis of COFO freedom registration data in the above note and MFDP convention records shows that the average Black voter registration rate by the end of August 1964 across most of the eighty-two counties in Mississippi was about 3

tion, political intimidation, and political violence, the MFDP's conventions enabled Black Mississippians to elect their own representatives, engage in political debate, and exercise their collective voice for the first time since the end of Reconstruction.

The MFDP conventions blended the traditional apparatus of a political party with the grassroots organizing of COFO. These political conventions paralleled the statewide convention structure of the Mississippi Democratic Party by holding precinct, county, district, and state conventions. Each convention opened with a prayer or scripture reading, a Black Mississippi tradition that had become a key part of the earlier COFO voter registration meetings across the state. Next, a local COFO organizer would begin the meeting with a short speech introducing the MFDP and its purpose. Local leadership succeeded COFO leadership when a permanent chairperson and secretary were elected next.

Once locals assumed leadership, the convention began to show its liberatory potential. Participants elected their neighbors and peers as delegates to proceed to the next level of the convention structure to represent them. This opportunity alone was unprecedented for Blacks in Mississippi, but in the MFDP, it led to the next level of participation: political debate and position taking on issues that were significant to Black Mississippians. With representatives elected and resolutions passed, conventions closed with a freedom song that spoke to the highest aim of the MFDP and the Mississippi Movement: freedom. MFDP conventions across the state followed a similar structure, but the leaders and issues were localized by precinct and county.

MFDP conventions at the precinct level were the first level

percent, with twelve outlier counties having rates between 10 to 15 percent. The alternative voter registration numbers provided by COFO's "freedom registration" show an average across counties of 10 percent, with ten counties having rates between 10 to 20 percent, nine counties with rates between 20 percent and 40 percent, and three counties with rates above 40 percent. In thirty counties that held MFDP conventions which I have recovered records for, the freedom registration rate average was closer to 20 percent rather than the average of 2 percent in counties without conventions. This is expected, given that potential convention participants were required to freedom register before participating and areas with higher numbers of freedom registered voters would have the momentum necessary to organize local conventions. In contrast, the average official voter registration rate for Blacks was a mere 3.9 percent in counties with MFDP conventions and 2.5 percent in those without. Those thirty counties are as follows: Benton, Bolivar, Clarke, Clay, Coahoma, Desoto, Desoto, Forrest, Hinds, Holmes, Jasper, Lafayette, Lauderdale, Leake, Lee, Leflore, Lowndes, Madison, Marshall, Monroe, Oktibbeha, Panola, Pike, Rankin, Simpson, Sunflower, Tippah, Union, Warren.

of participation, and they served as an opportunity for new leaders to raise themselves up and to make the party a vehicle of empowerment for their community. In Pike County, for instance, about sixty local residents gathered at the Precinct 6 meeting on July 27, 1964.[66] Once locals assumed control of the meeting, the first order of business was to elect a permanent chair and secretary to run the meeting going forward. The procedure was straightforward, but successful organizing often required continuous attempts to break well-founded fears of White violence.

At Precinct 6, where SNCC organizer Curtis Hayes opened the meeting, all ten nominees for precinct chairman refused, then all ten nominees for secretary refused. Hayes himself had survived SNCC's violent initiation in McComb, the largest city in Pike County, in 1961 when SNCC organizers faced arrest, harassment, and beatings by police and White vigilantes.[67] Three years later in 1964, COFO returned with the MFDP, and McComb proved even more dangerous. Between April 1 and July 27, residents witnessed seventeen incidents of political violence including at least seven bombings directed at homes of movement supporters or COFO offices.[68] On July 8, Hayes survived the bombing of the COFO office which would serve as the venue for the MFDP's Pike County convention. MFDP organizers sought to make it clear that, although White violence was a given, Black acquiescence was not.

After a discussion about the importance of the MFDP's work, Precinct 6 began another round of nominations. On the third round of voting that night, Samuel Rollins was elected chairman and Lillie Carstarphen was elected secretary. Both agreed to serve as delegates to the county convention to be held in COFO's recently bombed office. Both leaders were taking their first step into the movement that night and their election served notice that White violence would no longer compel Black acquiescence. Under their leadership, the members of Precinct 6 passed fifteen resolutions that covered issues such as fair employment practices, police brutality, the right to vote, integration,

[66] Minutes of "Precinct Meeting/Precinct 6 meeting cont.," July 27, 1964, "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Pike County Reports," MFDP Papers, 1964, https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee-pike/docview/2578753306/se-2.
[67] Howard Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (Boston: South End Press, 2002), 70-78.
[68] List of civil rights incidents in McComb, Mississippi, 1964, Civil Rights Movement Archive, https://www.crmvet.org/info/mccomb1964.pdf

and increased funding for schools and public works

In Holmes County, the MFDP's precinct meetings brought new and existing leaders together. At the Tchula precinct meeting, Ralthus Hayes, a local farmer, brought his neighbors into the party, just as he had once been recruited into the movement. Hayes had first tried to register to vote in 1954, but as he later described the attempt, he "didn't try to get others to go . . . See, it was different then."[69] By 1963, Hayes was leading classes on voter registration, but the MFDP gave him a new opportunity to build political power.[70] In 1964, he built the Holmes County Community Center, a base of civil rights organizing in Lexington, and the same year he recruited Cora Lee and Vanderbilt Roby into the Holmes County Freedom Democratic Party.[71] Their Tchula precinct meeting passed a number of resolutions on issues in their community, and Hayes soon traveled to the Holmes County Convention to carry them forward.

The MFDP's county conventions consolidated leadership from precincts, elected another round of delegates, and passed some of their most important resolutions on to the state convention. On August 1, 1964, over two hundred observers and delegates met at West Grove Missionary Baptist Church in Lexington, Mississippi, for the Holmes County MFDP Convention.[72] Ralthus Hayes, representing the Tchula precinct, was elected as convention chairman. Under Hayes's leadership, delegates from nearby towns like Mileston, Mount Olive, Tchula, Lexington, and Pilgrim's Rest were elected to serve as delegates to the MFDP state convention. Hayes worked with the delegates from Tchula, Lexington, and Pilgrim's Rest to pass resolutions on important issues that had been discussed at their precinct meetings. The delegates

[69] Sue [Lorenzi] Sojourner, Cheryl Reitan, and John Dittmer, *Thunder of Freedom: Black Leadership and the Transformation of 1960s Mississippi* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 38.
[70] Sojourner, Reitan, Dittmer, *Thunder of Freedom*, 67.
[71] "Biographies of the Candidates.," n.d., "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Campaign Materials for Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party," MFDP Papers, 1966, https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee/docview/2578769373/se-2; The Youth of the Rural Organizing and Cultural Center, *Minds Stayed on Freedom : The Civil Rights Struggle in the Rural South : An Oral History* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), http://archive.org/details/mindsstayedonfre00rura, 48.
[72] "Minutes: County Meeting for Holmes County F.D.P.", August 1, 1964, "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Holmes and Humphreys County Reports," MFDP Papers, 1965. https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee-holmes/docview/2578753082/se-2.

and their budding platform traveled next to the state convention in Jackson.

While delegates in Holmes County were meeting, their peers in Pike County assembled for a convention that passed one of the most significant policy platforms among MFDP county conventions. Delegates in Pike County elected a chairman, secretary, and delegates to the state convention, but they also presented over two dozen resolutions from precinct conventions melded into a nascent policy platform that formed a basis for the MFDP's state platform at the state convention in Jackson.[73] Delegates from Precinct 6 in Pike County brought their resolutions on fair employment practices, police brutality, the right to vote, integration, and increased funding for schools and public works, while delegates from Summit and Precinct 1 expanded the scope of the issues discussed.[74] By the time the Pike County Convention came to a close, delegates had compiled a policy list that sought school integration and improvements, public works and recreation improvements, fair employment, voting rights protections, civil rights protections, and an end to police brutality.[75] Emma Jean Smith, who had begun her journey as chairwoman of the Summit precinct meeting, now served on the county MFDP executive committee.[76] Samuel Rollins and Lillie Carstarphen, who reluctantly started their foray into civil rights at Precinct 6, also carried their hopes and policies forward to the state MFDP convention in Jackson as Pike County delegates.[77]

While Holmes County's convention gave rise to new leaders and Pike County built a significant policy platform, delegates at Sunflower County's convention spoke to the larger vision and significance

[73] "[Pike Co.] County Meeting," July 31, 1964, "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Pike County Reports," MFDP Papers, 1964. https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee-pike/docview/2578753306/se-2.

[74] "Pricinct Meeting/Precinct 6 meeting cont.," July 27, 1964, "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Pike County Reports," MFDP Papers, 1964, https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee-pike/docview/2578753306/se-2.; "Precinct 1 Minutes," July 27, 1964, "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Pike County Reports," MFDP Papers, 1964, https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee-pike/docview/2578753306/se-2.

[75] "[Pike Co.] County Meeting," July 31, 1964, "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Pike County Reports," MFDP Papers, 1964, https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee-pike/docview/2578753306/se-2.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid.

of the party. Irene Johnson, who was known for her fervent support of the movement, introduced Joe McDonald as the keynote speaker.[78] McDonald, an early leader in the Sunflower County Movement, reminded those gathered that he saw "the precinct and county meetings as a way of spreading the light of freedom in the movement, for the sakes of the future of the young people."[79] The next speaker, Oscar Giles, was more explicit about the nascent power of the party in Sunflower: "I'm here . . . because I'm not satisfied – I won't be until I see justice for all. Some people tell me to watch myself – I say they'd better watch themselves ."[80] Next, SNCC project director Charles McLaurin made clear that the MFDP was about the collective empowerment of all Black Mississippians. He exhorted the delegates to use their power wisely: "You are here today to elect the people who will run the Freedom Democratic Party . . . It is your duty to nominate all your good people. Some are stronger than others, so vote wisely."[81] But McLaurin was hopeful, and he drew the connection between the delegates and the collective empowerment of the Black community through the MFDP: "When the resolutions are passed, we will need people to go back to the community to make them a reality, to keep them alive. We can't worry about our individual selves any longer. The white people single us out—but we're fighting the system. It takes all of us."[82]

On August 6, 1964, over two thousand MFDP delegates and observers from across Mississippi gathered at the M. W. Stringer Masonic Grand Lodge in Jackson to consummate their history-making summer by electing a final round of delegates and ratifying a state platform. Delegates such as Oscar Giles from Sunflower County, Cora Smith from Holmes County, and Aaron Henry from Coahoma County were elected to represent the MFDP at the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey. After a summer of organizing and weeks of conventions, freedom agendas from across the state made their way to Jackson in the form of resolutions and were molded into an ambitious party platform. Although national party leaders would

[78] "Sunflower County Meeting," August 1, 1964, "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Files on Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party," MFDP Papers, 1969, https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee-files/docview/2578769226/se-2.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.

decide the fate of the MFDP's seating challenge that would be presented alongside the party's platform, the hundreds of Black Mississippians who organized and mobilized during the summer of 1964 had already made history.

Future-Building: The Freedom Platform

The MFDP's platform crafted a future while confronting reality. The party hoped to be a grassroots vehicle in Mississippi, while allying with the liberal wing of the Democratic Party nationally when there was agreement on policies that might benefit Black Mississippians and poor Whites. The MFDP's platform endorsed the national Democratic Party's 1960 platform, but only insofar as it advanced the interests of Black Mississippians.[83] In employment, they stressed the parties' agreement on the need for full employment, fair employment practices, and the repeal of anti-union legislation that kept Black Mississippians from joining unions to bargain for higher wages.[84] MFDP conventions in Panola, Lee, and Pike counties had all passed resolutions on fair employment and job opportunities, but the pro-union plank was undoubtedly a result of the Pike County MFDP's expansive policy platform, which included a commitment to fair employment, wage increases, and pro-union action.[85] The MFDP platform voiced agreement with the

[83] "Platform and Principles of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party," n.d., MFDP Organizational Papers, Platform Statements, 1964-1966, undated (MFDP Records 1962-1971; Archives Main Stacks, Mss 586, Box 1, Folder 1), Freedom Summer Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/p15932coll2/id/11271, 1.

[84] "Platform and Principles of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party," 1; "Full Employment," "Discrimination in Employment," "Collective Bargaining" in "1960 Democratic Party Platform," n.d., Democratic Party Platforms, The American Presidency Project, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/273234.

[85] "Be it resolved that we the people of Courtland voting precinct," July 28, 1964, Council of Federated Organizations Panola County Office records, 1963-1965; Archives Main Stacks, Mss 521, Box 1, Folder 14, Freedom Summer Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/p15932coll2/id/8136/rec/247.; "Freedom Democratic Party: Lee County Precinct and County Meetings," July 29, 1964, "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee County Reports," MFDP Papers, 1966, https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee-county/docview/2578753313/se-2; "Macedonia Precinct, Panola County, Mississippi, meeting–Freedom Democratic Party," July 27, 1964, Council of Federated Organizations Panola County Office records, 1963-1965; Archives Main Stacks, Mss 521, Box 1, Folder 14, Freedom Summer Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/p15932coll2/id/8149/rec/247; Minutes of "Precinct Meeting/Precinct 6 meeting cont.," July 27, 1964, "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Pike County Reports," MFDP Papers, 1964, https://

Democratic Party's commitment to farm wage supports, school lunch programs, and medical care as a part of the Social Security system, but they also spoke clearly on where the Democratic Party had fallen short in enforcing civil rights and voting rights.[86]

The MFDP's platform addressed a number of issues under the banner of civil rights and voting rights that had been priorities for Black Mississippians since the Reconstruction era. In 1890, the Mississippi Constitutional Convention, called by White supremacist Democrats eager to disenfranchise Black Mississippians, passed a new constitution which effectively ended Black voting in the state for generations.[87] Passage of the new constitution followed in the wake of widespread White attacks on Black civil rights in the state, including lynching and Ku Klux Klan terrorism, meant to curtail Black economic empowerment and voting.[88] By 1964, the national Democratic Party addressed some of these issues in their platform, but they often failed to follow through on protecting Black voting and civil rights in Mississippi.[89] This failure had been a point of tension between Mississippi activists and federal leaders for years.

---

www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee-pike/docview/2578753306/se-2; "Pike County Meeting," July 31, 1964, "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Pike County Reports," MFDP Papers, 1964, https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee-pike/docview/2578753306/se-2; "Precinct 1 Minutes," July 27, 1964, "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Pike County Reports," MFDP Papers, 1964, https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee-pike/docview/2578753306/se-2; "Summit Pricinct Meeting," July 30, 1964, "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Pike County Reports," MFDP Papers, 1964, https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee-pike/docview/2578753306/se-2; "West Batesville precinct meeting resolutions," July 27, 1964, Council of Federated Organizations Panola County Office records, 1963-1965; Archives Main Stacks, Mss 521, Box 1, Folder 14, Freedom Summer Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/p15932coll2/id/8122/rec/247.

[86] "Platform and Principles of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party," 2; "Minimum Wages," "Using Our Abundance," "Medical Care for Older Persons" in "1960 Democratic Party Platform," n.d., Democratic Party Platforms, The American Presidency Project, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/273234.

[87] James W. Loewen, *Mississippi: Conflict & Change* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1974), 184-188; Neil McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 38-48.

[88] Loewen, *Mississippi: Conflict and Change*, 154-165; Dennis J. Mitchell, "Redemption and Black Subjection" in *A New History of Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/201/monograph/book/33980, 217-245.

[89] "Civil Rights" in "1964 Democratic Party Platform," n.d., Democratic Party Platforms, The American Presidency Project, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/273239.

The MFDP's platform endorsed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and demanded that "both state and national officials . . . implement the principles of the law."[90] Calls for enforcement of the provisions of the act, which included provisions for school integration and prohibitions on discrimination in public facilities and in employment, had their roots in the MFDP's own resolutions on the integration of schools and public facilities and fair employment. Support for enforcement of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 had been a topic of unanimous agreement at MFDP conventions across Mississippi earlier in the summer.[91]

In addition to demanding that civil rights and voting rights be protected, the platform went further. It called for the abolition of the literacy test and if necessary, the use of the Fourteenth Amendment's penalty clause to reduce congressional representation for states like Mississippi that stopped Blacks from voting.[92] MFDP leaders in Lauderdale County had passed their own resolutions on the registration test, but leaders in Bolivar and Lowndes counties had singled out the

[90] "Platform and Principles of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party," 1.
[91] "Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party: County Convention for Bolivar," July 27, 1964, "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Bolivar and Carroll County Reports," MFDP Papers, 1964, https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee-bolivar/docview/2578752320/se-2; "Freedom Democratic Party, Minutes of the 9th Precinct Meeting," July 28, 1964., MFDP Lauderdale County--Meridian Precincts, Precinct No. 9 Meetings & Registration, 1964 (Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. Lauderdale County (Miss.) records, 1964-1966; Historical Society Library Microforms Room, Micro 55, Reel 2, Segment 39), Freedom Summer Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/p15932coll2/id/54532/rec/32; "Freedom Democratic Party: Lee County Precinct and County Meetings," July 29, 1964, "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee County Reports," MFDP Papers, 1966, https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee-county/docview/2578753313/se-2; "Lowdnes County Convention Minutes," August 2, 1964, "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee County Reports," MFDP Papers, 1963, https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee-county/docview/2578753336/se-2; "Freedom Democratic Party: Oktibbeha County Convention," August 2, 1964, "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee County Reports," MFDP Papers, 1966, https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee-county/docview/2578753990/se-2; "[Pike Co.] County Meeting," July 31, 1964, "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Pike County Reports," MFDP Papers, 1964, https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee-pike/docview/2578753306/se-2; "[Precinct 6] Precinct Meeting", July 27, 1964, "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Pike County Reports," MFDP Papers, 1964, https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee-pike/docview/2578753306/se-2; "Summit Precinct Meeting, Pike County," July 30, 1964, "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Pike County Reports," MFDP Papers, 1964, https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee-pike/docview/2578753306/se-2.
[92] "Platform and Principles of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party," 2.

use of federal funds, which were closely connected to White supremacy in Mississippi.[93] Accordingly, the MFDP platform went further than demanding enforcement of civil rights in Mississippi, it suggested alternative ways to compel state compliance. The platform advocated careful supervision of federal funds released to the state to ensure that they were not used to uphold segregation or deployed as a tool of coercion against civil rights workers.[94] The platform called for the cessation of state funding for groups like the Sovereignty Commission, a state entity used to surveil and suppress civil rights activity in the state.[95] Even on state funds, the MFDP singled out misuse and laid out a pro-freedom agenda.[96]

The MFDP's platform was suffused with the obvious racial implications of its pro-freedom policies, but it also sought to attack the economic arrangement that kept Black and White Mississippians poor. Notably, the party's platform and statement of principles opened by stating that "racial equality is only the first step in solving the basic problems of poverty, disease and illiteracy confronting American society."[97] The MFDP's state priorities included a reduction of the state sales tax and an increase in state income taxes to finance state services while alleviating taxes on the poor.[98] The platform also featured

[93] "Freedom Democratic Party, Minutes of the 9th Precinct Meeting," July 28, 1964., MFDP Lauderdale County–Meridian Precincts, Precinct No. 9 Meetings & Registration, 1964 (Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. Lauderdale County (Miss.) records, 1964-1966; Historical Society Library Microforms Room, Micro 55, Reel 2, Segment 39), Freedom Summer Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/p15932coll2/id/54532/rec/32;

"Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party: County Convention for Bolivar," July 27, 1964, "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Bolivar and Carroll County Reports," MFDP Papers, 1964, https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee-bolivar/docview/2578752320/se-2; "Lowdnes County Convention Minutes," August 2, 1964, "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee County Reports," MFDP Papers, 1963, https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee-county/docview/2578753336/se-2.

[94] "Platform and Principles of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party," 3; Bobby J. Smith II, "Chapter One. Food Denied, Food for Freedom: The 1962-1963 Greenwood Food Blockade" in *Food Power Politics: The Food Story of the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2023), 20-43.

[95] Jenny Irons, *Reconstituting Whiteness: The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2010), https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/167/monograph/book/504, 7-8; Yasuhiro Katagiri, *The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission: Civil Rights and States' Rights* (University Press of Mississippi, 2001), https://muse-jhu-edu.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/book/19666, pp. 5-10.

[96] "Platform and Principles of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party," 3.

[97] "Platform and Principles of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party," 1.

[98] "Platform and Principles of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party," 3.

strong support for anti-poverty programs, such as food stamps and a higher minimum wage.[99] Acknowledging the economic transformation underway, it called for job training programs to assist older Mississippi farmers in the transition away from agriculture and toward other jobs in the new economy.[100]

The MFDP's platform represented a combination of the efforts of MFDP delegates across the state who pressed the issues that mattered to them and the observations of veteran activists in the state who witnessed the problems and possibility of Mississippi. The platform embraced issues dating back to Reconstruction like civil rights and voting rights that were still pressing concerns in 1964. However, the party also tackled new issues, such as the need for economic transition assistance in light of the mechanization of agriculture in the state. The mixture of race conscious and multiracial economic and political aims grew out of the party's Black-led, but multiracial strategy. The nuanced platform was a direct result of the party's role as a grassroots vehicle of political empowerment.

A Grassroots Legacy

By August 1964, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was a serious statewide political party with chapters in almost half of the state's counties. Black Mississippians in familiar movement centers such as Sunflower County eagerly organized conventions and mobilized their neighbors to lead, vote, and develop an independent political agenda, but new centers also emerged. In dangerous places such as Pike County, initially hesitant leaders like Samuel Rollins and Lillie Carstarphen braved violence and disillusionment to build the party. When Oscar Giles told the convention in Sunflower County, "I'm here . . . because I'm not satisfied – I won't be until I see justice for all," he spoke for many of the local leaders who emerged during that history-making summer.[101] The spirit that motivated the MFDP's education, organiz-

[99] "Platform and Principles of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party," 2.
[100] "Platform and Principles of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party," 2; Asch, *The Senator and the Sharecropper*, 127-131, 226-227; Dittmer, *Local People*, 124-125, 364-365, 384-385; Temple Kirby Jack, *Rural -Worlds Lost: The American South, 1920-1960* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1986), 338-340, 348-349.
[101] "Sunflower County Meeting," August 1, 1964, "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Files on Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party," MFDP Papers, 1969, https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-commit-

ing, and agenda was captured in the words of SNCC organizer and native Mississippian Charles McLaurin: "We can't worry about our individual selves any longer. . . We're fighting the system. It takes all of us."[102]

1964 was the year that many Black Mississippians took part in democracy for the first time since Reconstruction. The MFDP's flyers, pamphlets, and tools of political education raised their expectations for their potential to gain power. Then, freedom conventions held in July and August before the 1964 Democratic National Convention allowed them to mobilize themselves into debate and action. Finally, the MFDP's state platform cemented their grassroots agenda into policy. The MFDP's work at the grassroots level in Mississippi elucidated the party's mission as a vehicle for education, mobilization, and future building, with a vision that stretched well beyond 1964.

Over the next two years, the party's potent blend of grassroots organizing and political pressure cracked the Mississippi iceberg that had frozen Black political power since the end of Reconstruction. In late August at the 1964 Democratic National Convention, Sunflower County MFDP leader Fannie Lou Hamer testified about the violence, intimidation, and political repression that undergirded White supremacy in Mississippi.[103] Months later, in January 1965, Annie Devine, Victoria Gray, and Fannie Lou Hamer led the MFDP's efforts to contest the seating of Mississippi's unfairly elected congressional delegation in a seven-month process that forced Mississippi leaders to defend the state's political repression that was increasingly unpalatable to congressional leaders.[104] While the MFDP leveraged national public and political support in both instances, it was local MFDP leaders and their party organizations that provided the conventions, delegates, and platform for the convention challenge and the depositions, testimonies, and lobbying for the congressional challenge. Though both efforts failed in their short-term goals, the MFDP's continuous pressure on Congress and President Lyndon Johnson helped set in motion passage

tee-files/docview/2578769226/se-2.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Dittmer, *Local People*, 288; Maegan Parker Brooks, "Is this America?," in *A Voice That Could Stir An Army* (University Press of Mississippi: Jackson, 2014), 86-120; *Walk With Me: A Biography of Fannie Lou Hamer* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2021), 171-175; Asch, *The Senator and the Sharecropper*, 212.

[104] Lawson, *Black Ballots*, 322-326; Dittmer, *Local* People, 337, 338-41, 351-52

of the Voting Rights Act in the summer of 1965.[105]

After passage of the Voting Rights Act, state and local MFDP leaders turned their attention back to electoral politics in Mississippi. By the fall of 1966, MFDP candidates were on the official ballot in Mississippi for the U.S. House, U.S. Senate, and in some local elections.[106] Though Black voter registration had been below 5 percent less than two years earlier, in 1966, it was now above 20 percent in all eight counties with local MFDP candidates.[107] In Holmes and Madison counties, it was above 50 percent.[108] Yet the November 1966 elections did not deliver victory for MFDP candidates. Continued White repression kept voter registration progress to significant but modest gains in many places, while voter intimidation and legislative changes to elections limited Black power at the polls.[109] Nonetheless, the MFDP's base of local leaders and party organizations across the state laid the groundwork for electoral success in the future.

The Holmes County MFDP was one of the many local parties that had been growing since the summer of 1964. The party had played a significant role in boosting the Black voter registration rate to over 50 percent in the majority-Black county by 1966.[110] MFDP volunteers had developed a sophisticated block captain system to thwart White repression by mobilizing locals for voter registration, voter turnout, and

[105] Dittmer, *Local People*, 352

[106] Asch, *The Senator and the Sharecropper*, 238 – 239; "Help Unseat Eastland and Abernathy Flyer," 1966, Civil Rights Movement Archive, https://www.crmvet.org/docs/66_mfdp_flyer.pdf; "Freedom Candidate For U.S. Senate: Clifton R. Whitley Flyer," 1966, Civil Rights Movement Archive, https://www.crmvet.org/docs/661108_mfdp_whitley-c.pdf; "Mississippi Local Election Results," November 1966, Civil Rights Movement Archive, https://www.crmvet.org/docs/661100_mfdp_results.pdf; Benjamin J. Guthrie and W. Pat Jennings, "Statistics of the Congressional Election of 1966" (U.S. Government Printing Office, March 31, 1967), https://clerk.house.gov/member_info/electionInfo/1966election.pdf; Sojourner, Reitan, and Dittmer. "The November 1966 Elections and Coalition Building: Fall 1966–January 1967" in *Thunder of Freedom*, 195–210.

[107] "Mississippi Voter Registration Numbers By District and County," 1966, Civil Rights Movement Archive, https://www.crmvet.org/docs/660000_mfdp_vr-districts.pdf.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Chris R. Danielson, *After Freedom Summer: How Race Realigned Mississippi Politics, 1965–1986* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 19-23; "Election Complaints," November 9, 1966, Civil Rights Movement Archive, https://www.crmvet.org/docs/661106_mfdp_interference.pdf; Dittmer, *Local People*, 394, 409-410; Frank R. Parker and Eddie N. Williams, "Mississippi's Massive Resistance to Black Political Empowerment" in *Black Votes Count: Political Empowerment in Mississippi After 1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 34-77; Sojourner, Reitan, Dittmer, *Thunder of Freedom*, 166, 199.

[110] "Mississippi Voter Registration Numbers By District and County," 1966, Civil Rights Movement Archive, https://www.crmvet.org/docs/660000_mfdp_vr-districts.pdf.

poll watching.[111] Accordingly, Holmes County stood at the forefront of the battle for Black political power as the 1967 elections approached.

The MFDP's candidate for highest office in Holmes County was local educator Robert G. Clark Jr., who ran for state representative.[112] Clark had joined the MFDP after becoming disillusioned with local White leaders who were unwilling to back a proposed job training program for Black Head Start teachers.[113] He echoed the MFDP's commitments in his campaign by calling for additional aid to feed, clothe, and educate children, compulsory school attendance, job training programs for adults, free junior college education for all, and better job opportunities.[114] As Clark campaigned shortly before Election Day, he reminded Holmes County residents: "We are poor only because we have been deprived of opportunities."[115] Like early MFDP leaders, Clark sought to reverse the political dynamic that kept Black Mississippians marginalized.

On November 7, 1967, Robert Clark narrowly won election to the state legislature, translating MFDP organizing into the first significant Black electoral victory since Reconstruction.[116] Clark reminded Black Mississippians of the collective vision that he sought to carry forward, stating, "I can be of better service to total Mississippi rather than Holmes County alone."[117] Only three years after its founding, the MFDP had brought the goal of Black political power closer to reality

[111] Sojourner, Reitan, Dittmer, *Thunder of Freedom*, 158-159, 196. See the Holmes County MFDP's Executive Handbook for more on the MFDP's "political machine" building in Holmes: "Holmes County Freedom Democratic Party Executive Members Handbook," August 1966, Civil Rights Movement Archive, https://www.crmvet.org/docs/6608_mfdp_hc-excom-r.pdf.
[112] Sojourner, Reitan, Dittmer, *Thunder of Freedom*, 259.
[113] Clark Robert, Interview by John Dittmer with Robert Clark, Video, March 14, 2013, Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History & Culture and the Library of Congress, 29-30; Sojourner, Reitan, Dittmer, *Thunder of Freedom*, 230-231.
[114] "Negro Tells Why He Ran – And Won," *Longview Daily News*, November 9, 1967; Sojourner, Reitan, Dittmer, *Thunder of Freedom*, 261.
[115] Sojourner, Reitan, Dittmer, *Thunder of Freedom*, 261.
[116] Dittmer, *Local People*, 416; Sojourner, Reitan, Dittmer, *Thunder of Freedom*, 265-266.
[117] "Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party Newsletter Vol. 9 Number 3," November 27, 1967, "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Files on Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party," MFDP Papers, 1964, https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee-files/docview/2578775850/se-2.

than it had been in almost a hundred years. As Clark told the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party newsletter, "[N]ow is the time . . . to discuss the political future of the Negro in Mississippi."[118]

[118] Ibid.

Lafayette Visits Mississippi as the "Guest of the Nation"

by William "Brother" Rogers

> As soon as, on the other side of the Atlantic, I received the honorable invitation to which your representatives in [C]ongress had most kindly participated, I did, with lively satisfaction, anticipate the pleasure to visit the state of Mississippi. – Lafayette, 1825[1]

Marie-Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier, better known to history as the Marquis de Lafayette or General Lafayette, visited Natchez, Mississippi, on April 18, 1825. He was back in the United States nearly half a century after the American Revolution. Walking with the aid of a cane, this man in his late sixties who was called the "Hero of Two Worlds" decided to visit each of the twenty-four states that existed at the time. Mississippi was the sixteenth state on his itinerary.

The idea for the trip began in early 1824 with an invitation approved by Congress and sent by President James Monroe, who also was a decorated veteran of the American Revolutionary War (he is depicted carrying the flag in the 1851 painting *Washington Crossing the Delaware*) and was in the final year of his second term. The timing was good for Lafayette. The American government might provide some financial compensation for his sacrifices. Once one of the richest men in France, he had lost most of his fortune in both the American Revolution and the French Revolution.[2]

Lafayette was born in France in 1757 to aristocratic parents on both sides. With the deaths of his father when Lafayette was two and his mother when he was twelve, Lafayette became an orphan. He also became through inheritance one of the wealthiest boys in France. At

[1] Edgar Ewing Brandon, *A Pilgrimage of Liberty: A Contemporary Account of the Triumphal Tour of General Lafayette through the Southern and Western States in 1825, as Reported by the Local Newspapers* (Athens, OH: The Lawhead Press, 1944), 207.
[2] Marian Klaman, *The Return of Lafayette, 1824-1825* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), 8.

WILLIAM "BROTHER" ROGERS is a historian at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. He is a past president and secretary-treasurer of the Mississippi Historical Society.

age sixteen, he wed fourteen-year-old Adrienne, whose maiden name was Noailles. This name was as recognizable in France at the time for wealth as Rockefeller or Vanderbilt is today in the United States.

At age nineteen, the tall, awkward teenager ran away from home after becoming infatuated with George Washington and the American fight for independence from the British, whom the French detested. Unlike most runaway youths, this boy had the means to take with him a ship outfitted with soldiers, supplies, and ammunition that was destined for the New World.

In 1777, Lafayette landed in South Carolina and soon traveled to the nation's capital, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he met George Washington. When Washington took Lafayette to inspect his troops and apologized for their appearance, Lafayette humbly said, "I am here to learn, not to teach." Unlike most foreign officers who came to America, Lafayette wanted no pay and most importantly, he spoke English.[3]

Washington was most impressed by Lafayette's bravery in the Battle of Brandywine, near Philadelphia. The fight was a loss for the Americans, and Lafayette was wounded in the leg. Yet, he inspired the troops in the midst of chaos by organizing an orderly retreat. Afterward, Washington petitioned Congress to elevate his status as an honorary major general and give him a field command.

Lafayette spent the winter of 1777-1778 with Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and others at Valley Forge recuperating and training with the Continental Army. After several battles including the Rhode Island campaign, he returned to France, where he encouraged support for the American cause. In 1780, he was back with the army in time to chase Benedict Arnold and British General Charles Cornwallis through the Virginia countryside. He commanded one of the three American divisions in the siege of Yorktown in 1781 and witnessed the surrender of Cornwallis, which much to Lafayette's delight was aided considerably by the French Fleet and French Army.

Throughout his time in the United States, Lafayette won the hearts of many American soldiers, citizens, and statesmen but none more so than George Washington. The most famous man in America had no biological children and considered Lafayette like a son. Known

[3] Mike Duncan, *Hero of Two Worlds: The Marquis de Lafayette in the Age of Revolution* (New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2021), 55.

for his reserve, Washington was often feared and certainly respected by others. Lafayette could cut through this reserve like no one else. For example, he would ebulliently kiss Washington on both cheeks. Most others were scared to even pat him on the back.[4]

Fast forward to 1824, and Lafayette was the last living major general of the American Revolutionary War. He had not been back to the United States since 1784 and decided to accept the formal invitation to return to the land of liberty that attracted him in his youth and changed his life forever.

The general's "Pilgrimage of Liberty" began when he landed on August 16, 1824, at Castle Clinton (then known as Castle Garden) on the southern tip of Manhattan Island in New York City. Lafayette left New York on August 20 to visit several states in New England, and his adventure would continue for thirteen months. Historian Edgar Ewing Brandon wrote:

> The visit of Lafayette to the United States in 1824-25 on invitation from Congress was a unique event. Never before or since, in the history of the world has a private citizen been the "Guest of the Nation," and the recipient of such prolonged and spontaneous adulation. A French biographer in his life of Lafayette writes: "In all its magnificent descriptions of victories and triumphs, history offers nothing which compares with the simple narration of Lafayette's tour of America." . . . The generation of the Revolution had almost disappeared from life's arena, but the return of a prominent and generous participant in that receding era kindled anew the fires of patriotism and made the second generation more conscious of the civil, religious and social liberties that a republican form of government had secured for it. . . . It is a notable event in the history of the nation and a lasting tribute to the principles of freedom on which the Republic is founded.[5]

[4] Ibid., 54.
[5] Brandon, *A Pilgrimage of Liberty*, preface.

A contentious presidential election took place in 1824 pitting John Quincy Adams against Andrew Jackson. James Monroe's Era of Good Feeling was fading. In the midst of this acrimonious election that would end with Jackson's accusation of a corrupt bargain between Adams and Henry Clay, Lafayette's tour was a tonic of unity. Marian Klamkin wrote:

> No event in the early nineteenth-century history of the United States was the cause of such great excitement, unification, and celebration among its citizens as the return to these shores, after an absence of over forty years, of the Revolutionary War hero, General Marie-Joseph-Paul-Yves-Roch-Gilbert Motier Lafayette. The visit took place in the year 1824-25 and American patriotism reached an unprecedented peak in a time of peace. The year-long visit of the nation's guest served two important purposes: first, it gave the country an opportunity to show its gratitude to the only surviving major-general of the War for Independence; second, it restored to an aging Lafayette his dignity, pride, and fortune, all of which had been sorely depleted through his long years spent in fighting for individual freedom in his own country.[6]

Lafayette was a unifying figure. Historian Alan R. Hoffman explained, "Unlike the great living American leaders whose early brilliance had been dimmed by controversial political careers—John Adams, Jefferson and Madison all fall into this category—Lafayette burst on the American scene with his reputation largely intact and unsullied."[7] He also had a larger-than-life personality characterized by an irrepressible enthusiasm. Elizabeth Reese observed:

> It was not only Lafayette's age, wealth, and country of origin that made him unique among the Founding Fathers but also his personality. Unlike the other mem-

[6] Klamkin, *The Return of Lafayette, 1824-1825*, 1.
[7] Auguste Levasseur, *Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825: Journal of a Voyage to the United States*, trans. Alan R. Hoffman (Manchester, NH: Lafayette Press, 2006), xix.

> bers of the Founding generation, who come across as emotionless and stuffy, Lafayette practically leaps off the page with enthusiastic vigor. Only nineteen years old when he first arrived in America, his youthful exuberance gave him a passion for liberty that stoked the embers throughout the prolonged war. When victory seemed a far cry from reality, Lafayette brought the French fleet to the Continental army's aid. When Washington's own men doubted his ability to lead, Lafayette remained steadfast at his side. To Americans, Lafayette's youth, passion and generosity made him a living symbol of their country, and they were eager to welcome him back for a long overdue celebration.[8]

Lafayette's triumphant return became one of the greatest celebrations in American history. Ryan L. Cole explained, "It was the greatest joy the young republic ever experienced, the grandest celebration it would ever stage, a heartfelt profusion of gratitude and an illumination of liberty, ignited by its great apostle around memories of the American Revolution, blazing from the coast of the Atlantic Ocean to the banks of the Mississippi River."[9]

Lafayette spent the winter of 1824-1825 in Washington, D.C., a city named for his idol and that had not existed when he last left the country. President Monroe hosted a dinner for him at the White House, then called the President's House. Monroe had first encountered Lafayette in 1777. They were less than a year apart in age. Both were young officers under Washington. Both fought in the Battle of Brandywine. Both suffered through the harsh winter in Valley Forge.[10]

Their bond grew closer when Monroe was Minister to France during the French Revolution. While Lafayette was locked away in an Austrian prison, his wife Adrienne was imprisoned in Paris during the Reign of Terror and expecting to be executed by guillotine, as had happened already to her sister, mother, and grandmother. Monroe, with

[8] Elizabeth Reese, *Marquis de Lafayette Returns: A Tour of America's National Capital Region* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2024), 16.
[9] Ryan L. Cole, *The Last Adieu: Lafayette's Triumphant Return, the Echoes of Revolution, and the Gratitude of the Republic* (Nashville, TN: Harper Horizon, an imprint of HarperCollins Focus LLC, 2025), xi.
[10] Tim McGrath, *James Monroe: A Life* (New York, NY: Dutton, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2020), 37-40.

help from his courageous wife Elizabeth, diplomatically arranged for Adrienne's release. He also assisted their son, George Washington Lafayette, by arranging his safe passage to America.[11] This son, now in his mid-forties, accompanied his father on the triumphal tour of the U.S. Surely, their reunion with the Monroes was more than ceremonial. It was emotional and heartfelt.

Lafayette's travel party included two others (his wife was deceased): his valet Bastien, and his private secretary, Auguste Levasseur. Levasseur kept a journal of the trip and published it in 1829 under the title *Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825*.[12] It is the only source of information about the group's trip to Natchez, other than newspaper accounts.

Lafayette and his party entered Virginia where they visited Washington's grave at Mount Vernon, the battlefield at Yorktown, Thomas Jefferson at Monticello, and James Madison at Montpelier. Then on December 10, 1824, coincidentally exactly seven years after Mississippi became a state, the old soldier made history again. He addressed a joint session of Congress in the House of Representatives, today's National Statuary Hall in the U.S Capitol. Lafayette was the first foreign dignitary to address Congress. Today, his full-length portrait and one of George Washington are the only two paintings in the chamber of the House of Representatives.[13]

Two weeks later the Congress showed its gratitude to Lafayette by awarding him $200,000 in addition to a township track of land (24,000 acres) in Florida. The old general was reluctant at first to accept compensation. However, for a man who had lost his fortune fighting for freedom on two continents, such a gift was greatly appreciated.[14]

Virginia, a slave state like Mississippi, was the first southern state on Lafayette's tour. Lafayette was a staunch abolitionist who abhorred slavery. The contradiction between American liberty and American slavery was obvious and odious to him. Levasseur surely reflected the opinion of his traveling companion when he recorded these thoughts from Virginia in his journal:

[11] Ibid., 140-142
[12] Levasseur, *Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825*, xix.
[13] Richard F. Grimmett, "The Marquis de Lafayette's Return to the United States 1824-1825," *The White House Quarterly*, Winter 2024, 25-26.
[14] Ibid.

> In this part of the United States, the prejudices against the blacks, it must be confessed, keep a great number of slave-owners blindfolded. . . . It is in vain that some individuals, blinded by their prejudices, exclaim that there is no hope of improving the African race, which is only intermediate to man and the brutes, in the scale of being. Numerous facts have long since refuted this absurd assertion; and moreover, may it not be asked of those who are so proud of the whiteness of their skin, and who judge the blacks only by what they are, not what they are capable of, if they know well what would be the condition of their descendants after several generations, were slavery suddenly transferred from the blacks to the whites.[15]

Lafayette's sojourn through the South brought him through the Carolinas, Georgia, and eventually to Mobile, Alabama, where his entourage boarded the steamboat *Natchez*. It "was a luxuriously appointed boat, its lounge an ornate hotel lobby with rich oriental rugs, oil paintings, and chandeliers. It carried a famous New Orleans chef, an orchestra, and a large staff of maids and butlers that saw to the passengers' every need."[16] This vessel provided their transportation across the Gulf of Mexico (where they weathered a severe storm) and then ascended the Mississippi River to New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Natchez, and St. Louis.

Lafayette arrived in New Orleans on April 10, 1825, in a driving rainstorm. While at the Cabildo, or City Hall, he "reviewed troops from his balcony and this was followed by a review of a group of one hundred Choctaw Indians. The General was gratified that the allies of the Americans in the Seminole War had been included in the ceremonies."[17]

Coincidentally, Lafayette had met the great Choctaw chief Pushmataha four months earlier in Washington, D.C. Pushmataha and his fellow chief, Mushulatubbee, were in the nation's capital attempting to negotiate better terms for their people. According to Le-

[15] Levasseur, *Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825*, 228-229.
[16] Harlow Giles Unger, *Lafayette* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2002), 357.
[17] Klaman, *The Return of Lafayette, 1824-1825*, 144-145.

vasseur, Pushmataha spoke these words when he addressed Lafayette:

> There have been 50 snows since you drew your sword as Washington's companion: with him you fought the enemies of America. In mixing your blood generously with the blood of your enemies, you have proven your devotion to the cause that you were defending. After having ended this war, you returned to your Fatherland, and now you come to revisit this land where you are honored and blessed by the gratitude of a numerous and powerful people. You see everywhere the children of those whose liberty you defended crowd around you and clasp your hands with a filial affection. We have heard recounted all these things in the depths of our most faraway shelters, and our hearts have been consumed by the desire to see you. We have come, we have clasped your hand and we are satisfied. It is the first time that we see you and probably the last. We will no longer meet. The land will separate us forever. . . .[18]

Sadly, Pushmataha died on December 24, 1824, just days after his encounter with Lafayette. The legendary Choctaw warrior and chief received full military honors at his funeral and was buried in the Congressional Cemetery on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. Levasseur noted Pushmataha's death in his journal.

While in New Orleans, Lafayette met a group of African American men who had fought in the War of 1812. He shook the hand of each man and said, "I have often during the War of Independence seen African blood shed with honor in our ranks for the cause of the United States."[19] Lafayette left New Orleans on April 15 and made a brief stop in Baton Rouge before continuing to Natchez.

Natchez was the only place in Mississippi that Lafayette visited. Jackson, founded in 1821 as the state capital, was too new, too small, and too far out of the way. Still, Natchez did not appear on the itinerary published in Washington before Lafayette left there, and he did not get an official invitation from the general assembly, as the state

[18] Levasseur, *Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825*, 262-263.
[19] Duncan, *Hero of Two Worlds*, 395.

legislature was called prior to the Constitution of 1832. However, in January 1825, the legislators passed the following resolution:

> *Resolved, by the Senate and House of Representatives of the state of Mississippi in General Assembly convened,* That we view with approbation, the distinguished honors that have been paid to General La Fayette, by the citizens and constituted authorities of the Atlantic States, and officers of the General Government; that we accord in the general glow of grateful recollection, of the very important services rendered and sacrifices incurred by him in behalf of our country, at a period full of danger and despondency; estimating as a debt which time cannot impair or treasure cancel, the efforts of the youthful champion of the rights of man, which urged into being, and placed in a proud rank among the nations of the earth, the parent stock, on which, as a state, we are engrafted.
>
> The descendants of the revolutionary veterans, who have sunk in peaceful repose in the western wilds, whose ashes lie entombed on the margin of the Mississippi, or as the enterprising sons of a prolific parent, for whom her extended limits and growing resources have provided a home in the west; we join our voices in the general burst of National gratitude and welcome.
>
> *And it is further resolved*, That our Senators in Congress be instructed, and our Representatives be requested to use all means in their power, to procure a liberal provision to be made for General La Fayette by congress, and that he be invited, in the name of the Nation, to reside during the closing period of his life, within the United States.[20]

Lafayette saw this resolution before he departed Washington, D.C. He also knew that Natchez was the largest and most important city in Mississippi. He planned to visit every state and would be passing by Natchez on his river route from New Orleans to St. Louis. It is

[20] Brandon, *A Pilgrimage of Liberty*, 201.

easy to see why he added the city to his itinerary. He wanted to stop in Mississippi. The state probably had more than 100,000 inhabitants in 1825, more than one-third of whom were enslaved people. Adams County, where Natchez is located, was the largest county with around 13,000 people.[21]

In every place that Lafayette stopped, the war hero was feted with parades, receptions, dinners, and many toasts. Natchez would be no different, except all the festivities would have to be squeezed into the brief twenty-four hours Lafayette spent there. To make plans for the most distinguished foreigner to ever visit the state, the city council of Natchez called a mass meeting on March 28, 1825, that included citizens from adjoining counties. Attendees adopted a resolution of appreciation for Lafayette and appointed a committee of fourteen to make detailed plans. A children's parade was planned. All officers and uniformed companies in the area were invited to assemble in Natchez to assist in the celebration. Two men were selected to travel immediately to New Orleans to escort the general to the city.[22]

The steamboat *Natchez* pulled into view of its namesake city at dawn on Monday, April 18, 1825. The firing of cannons heralded the arrival of the famous visitor from France. Appropriately, one cannon was "Old Saratoga," a relic of the Revolutionary War that was captured from the British in October 1777 at the Battle of Saratoga. Another was a French cannon. Both cannons had been acquired in Natchez after being used in the Battle of New Orleans in 1815. Captain John Bobb commanded the firing in Natchez.[23]

Lafayette and his traveling companions disembarked at Bacon's Landing. He entered a luxurious four-horse carriage, while his son and secretary followed in a similar one. Their destination was Tichenor's Field high on the bluff, but they did not take a direct route. Instead, Levasseur noted, "[T]he members of the committee of arrangements were clever enough to conduct us by a circuitous route, along which all the beauties of the country unfolded before our eyes." A massive crowd lined the route, including men on horseback, women in

[21] Census Bulletin, No 31. Washington, D.C. January 16, 1901.
[22] Brandon, *A Pilgrimage of Liberty*, 201.
[23] Jeff T. Giambrone, "The Voice of Old Saratoga: A Revolutionary War Cannon in Natchez, Mississippi," *Journal of Mississippi History* 83, no. 1 and no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2021): 92-94, 98-99.

carriages, and militia on foot.[24]

Lafayette reviewed various troops with names such as the Natchez Fencibles, La Fayette Riflemen, Adams Guard, and from nearby Claiborne County, the Mississippi Guards. Then, in the type of formal ceremony he had experienced dozens of times, but in which he always took delight, Lafayette met the city council at the entrance to the city and heard a welcome address from its president, William Burns. As reported in the *Natchez Gazette*, Burns said:

> The President and Selectmen, for themselves and their fellow citizens, of the city of Natchez, tender you assurances of the sincere pleasure which they feel on your entrance to this city, in compliance with the invitation which has been communicated to you by a committee appointed to perform that pleasing duty. We receive, and welcome you among us, with undivided affection and cordiality, mingled with emotions of the deepest gratitude, at the recollection of eminent services and sacrifices, which you encountered at the dawn of manhood, to achieve the Independence of our country, and to establish in the new world, those principles of Liberty, which had long been exploded by the arbitrary Governments of Europe, and which throughout your eventful life, you have steadily maintained, and defended, in both Hemispheres. We present to your view no splendid edifices, nor pompous display of brilliant preparation, which you have witnessed in cities of greater maturity, . . . but we yield to *none* in our veneration of your exalted character, and our admiration of the noble and disinterested patriotism, which have marked your devotion to the great cause of human rights; unmoved, either by the appalling frown of despots, or the proscription of ambitious demagogues. The glorious career through which you have passed, will form the brightest page in the annals of faithful history, and like the fame which all mankind have decreed to your illustrious companion in arms, the immortal Washington, Time,

[24] Levasseur, *Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825*, 385.

> which consigns to oblivion deeds less conspicuous and meritorious, will serve to give to *yours*, additional interest and increased brilliancy.[25]

After more praise for Lafayette's deeds, Burns pointed out the nation's progress:

> You will now find this extensive and fertile region, comprising, at once brave, urbane, polite and intelligent; emulating in industry, enterprize, and all the civic virtues, the fairest and most polished portions of our country, covering with the surplus of the rich products of their fields, the majestic River, on the banks of which I now address you; opening fresh veins of commercial enterprize; rapidly advancing in manufactures of various descriptions, and spreading over its wide domain, in every direction, schools and college edifices, accessible alike to the poor, and the wealthy—Such is the progress of a people, unfettered by the trammels of arbitrary power; and protected in all the rights of persons and of property, by equal laws, founded on the basis of "regulated Liberty."[26]

Burns then mentioned the recent presidential election of 1824, which he said would have caused many nations to resort to violence. He lauded the United States for remaining peaceful and thanked Lafayette for his role in founding such a nation with the "durability of those free institutions." Burns concluded that when Lafayette returned to France, he would:

> . . . leave a people, to whom you are connected by so many endearing ties and recollections, with the full assurance, that they will transmit to generations yet unborn, the blessings of free government; and that in every part of this great Republic you have been received by all classes of its citizens, with hearts penetrated

[25] Brandon, *A Pilgrimage of Liberty*, 203-204.
[26] Ibid., 204.

> with fervent gratitude for your distinguished services in the Revolution; in which sentiments and feelings, the citizens of Natchez most cordially united, with every wish for the repose and happiness of the Soldier of Liberty, and the Patriot of the World.[27]

Lafayette, who by now was experienced at speaking at these formal ceremonies, responded in his French-accented, but fluent English:

> With the most lively and reciprocal feelings I receive your friendly congratulations on my reaching this beautiful part of the country, on my entering this interesting city of Natchez, where I have been so honorably invited; where I am so affectionately welcomed by the people, and addressed by you, sir, in so very gratifying terms, and where I have to witness the wonders of creation and improvement that are the most unanswerable, practical argument in favor of Republican institutions. We are entitled indeed to congratulate each other on those blessed circumstances you have enumerated, and most happily described. Well may your majestic River be proud to wash none but Republican shores, and to be covered with the produce of ever encreasing wealth, and spirited industry of that dignified population to whom, in your so well deserved qualifications you have done proper justice; I have also to thank you for your kind and very flattering allusions to past times, and I entreat you, Messrs. President and Selectmen, to accept my respectful and affectionate acknowledgements to you and to the citizens of Natchez.[28]

Everyone joined a festive procession along Main Street through the town, with a crowd of well-wishers clapping their hands and waiving handkerchiefs. Dignitaries included local elected officials, the governor of Louisiana, military officers, volunteer companies, the Missis-

[27] Ibid., 205.
[28] Ibid.

sippi congressional delegation, state legislators, federal judges, state supreme court justices, local judges, local lawyers, and more.

Unfortunately, Governor Walter Leake was unable to attend due to illness. He certainly must have been sick because he was a Revolutionary War veteran. Leake died seven months later. He sent his aide-de-camp to greet Lafayette, who supposedly said, "Walter Leake! I think I remember him! Is he not from Virginia?" Leake, just like Lafayette, had run away from home to fight and at age nineteen participated in the siege at Yorktown. Lafayette recalled, "Walter Leake deserted home to fight for his country."[29]

In place of the governor, the mayor of Natchez, Robert H. Adams, made a formal, official speech "on one of the most elevated points on the banks of the Mississippi in view of the City and the river."[30] As recorded in the *Natchez Gazette*, Adams said:

> In behalf of the city of Natchez, and of the county of Adams, which I have the honor to represent, and in the name of the state of Mississippi, I have this day the happiness of bidding you welcome to our soil.
> Having witnessed in your youth the infant struggles of our Republic against the usurpations of the mother country, with a magnanimity, and Heroism unsurpassed in the annals of the world, you left your friends, your family, and your country to enlist as a volunteer in the sacred cause of freedom. You threw your fortunes, and your sword into the lighter scale, and gloriously contributed to secure to our fathers the Liberty, and Independence which we their children enjoy. And now after an absence of nearly half a century you revisit a land which is full of the monuments to your glory—and what must be still dearer to a generous soul, a people who are collectively, and individually penetrated by the highest conception of your merits, and the warmest gratitude for your services.
> While fighting the battles of our Revolution by the side

[29] "Sketch of Gov. Walter Leake, of Mississippi," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 11, no. 4 (April 1904), 419.
[30] Levasseur, *Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825*, 386.

> of Washington, the soil on which we stand was comparatively a desert—seldom traversed except by the untutured [sic] Indian—or the roaming beasts of the Forest. Since then how great the change! The Liberty for which you fought, the Independence which you helped to achieve, have caused an expansion of spirit, a march of industry, and enterprise by which the obstacles of nature have been surmounted—and the boundless forests of the west converted into a fruitful garden. The majestic River on whose bosom you have been conveyed amongst us, and which seems to swell with conscious pride on this interesting occasion, now bears upon its current to the sea, the wealth and commerce of nine Independent States, which have sprung into existence under the mild and genial influence of our federative system. . . . Friend and Fellow Soldier of Washington, accept our grateful welcome—accept the feeble testimony which we are able to bear to the virtues of a name recorded in the history of our country's glory, and indelibly impressed upon the affections of every American heart.[31]

Lafayette replied:

> Sir—As soon as, on the other side of the Atlantic, I received the honorable invitation to which your representatives in [C]ongress had most kindly participated, I did, with lively satisfaction, anticipate the pleasure to visit the state of Mississippi. Those feelings, sir, could not but be encouraged by the kind and flattering resolutions and letters which have since met me during my happy journey through the United States. Now, sir, with you, with the people of Mississippi who so affectionately welcome me, I am enabled to enjoy a sight, in which none of us old American patriots, can more fully delight than I do: the sight of those wonders produced among you by the blessings of self-government. Noth-

[31] Brandon, *A Pilgrimage of Liberty*, 207.

> ing indeed can be more gratifying, nor can prove more useful than to consider what this beautiful, fertile part of America has remained, and was doomed for ages to remain, under the anti-social governments of the European courts and of local institutions congenial with them, and to compare it with the creations, improvements, splendid prospects which have been the rapid result of republican principles, and of a happy union to the grand American confederacy. I am highly obliged by the manner in which you are pleased to express the welcome I have the happiness to meet from the county of Adams, the city of Natchez, and the people of Mississippi. To them, sir, to the members of both branches of the legislature, to the respected governor, who, young as he was at that time, has been my companion in arms, and to you, sir, I have the honor to offer my respectful and affectionate acknowledgements.[32]

Just as the old general completed his remarks and entered his carriage to continue the festivities, a man ran out of the crowd toward the carriage waving his hat and exclaimed, "Honor to the Commander of the Parisian National Guard! I was under your command in '91, my General; I was a part of the battalion of the Filles Saint-Thomas. I still love liberty as I loved it then: *Vive Lafayette!. . .*" Lafayette was thrilled to meet this former French citizen-soldier and reached out of his carriage to affectionately express his pleasure.[33]

The next stop was the Steamboat Hotel (corner of Franklin and Wall Streets), where the guest of honor attended a reception to meet the citizens of Natchez. The first ones he met were children. Andrew Marschalk, a former soldier turned newspaper editor who was misidentified by Levasseur in his journal as "Colonel Marshall," brought in children to greet the famous visitor. They paraded before him and shouted in unison, "Welcome Lafayette!" He shook each one's hand, much to the delight of the parents. "When they are grown," they said, "and when upon examining the pages of the history of their country, they will find the name of Lafayette intimately connected to all the

[32] Ibid.
[33] Levasseur, *Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825*, 386.

events that have brought about the liberation of their fathers, they will recall the grace of his manners and the sweetness of his voice when he greeted them in their childhood, and they will feel their love of a liberty won by such a man increase. . . ."[34] The newspaper account mentioned that Lafayette paid particular attention to the twin sons of Mr. P. Briell. It is conceivable that some of these children might have lived with that memory into the twentieth century.

Louisiana governor Henry Johnson, who had ascended the river with Lafayette, attended the reception at the Steamboat Hotel, as did Peter Bryan Bruin, a Revolutionary War veteran and former controversial judge in the Mississippi Territory. Bruin's name is perhaps more associated with the Civil War, since the eponymous town of Bruinsburg is where General Ulysses S. Grant landed in 1863 on the way to Vicksburg.

The newspaper lists seventeen toasts that were made at the reception by various guests, including George Washington Lafayette and Levasseur. The toast by Lafayette himself is recorded as, "The city of Natchez, and the state of Mississippi—May this rising star be as brilliant in the American constellation as its name-sake is splendid among the rivers."[35]

Next on the agenda for the indefatigable Lafayette was a grand ball at Traveller's Hall (corner of State and Canal Streets) that lasted late into the night. As described in the *Natchez Gazette*:

> The company separated at an early hour, and in the evening, the venerable La Fayette attended a ball very tastefully managed, at the large room in Travelers Hall.—The display was very imposing—the walls were ornamented with a profusion of evergreens, intermingled with natural flowers; and being brilliantly illuminated, gave the best effect to the graceful forms and fair faces, assembled upon this joyful occasion.
>
> The veteran, in whose honour, these testimonies of gratitude were offered was introduced individually to each of the ladies, having a passing compliment for each.

[34] Ibid.
[35] Brandon, *A Pilgrimage of Liberty*, 209.

> The ball was most numerously attended; so much so that the room which is very spacious and crouded [sic], and some difficulty experienced by the dancers.
> Among the ladies present, was Miss Wright,[36] so favourably known to the American people, and whose defence of the institutions and manners of the country, have drawn upon her the scurrility of the Quarterly Review, and other hireling presses. She was accompanied by her sister and a female friend. The weather was very fine, the utmost harmony prevailed, not an accident happened to mar the pleasures of the day, and evening—and the General and with his suite embarked on board the Natchez Steamboat, Capt. Davis, about one o'clock, on Tuesday morning, under a national salute followed by the blessings of the whole community.[37]

In his notes, Levasseur wrote, "It was only after the ball ended at dawn that the General could think of reembarking. The ladies employed all their charm and grace in order to keep him for the longest possible time; but we counted our minutes, and at six o'clock in the morning we were already aboard our ship."[38]

The final spontaneous event was so dramatic that both Levasseur and the newspaper took notice. Just when General Lafayette was about to board the steamboat *Natchez*, an elderly veteran of the Revolutionary War approached and displayed the scars of war still visible on his chest. "These wounds are my pride," he said; "I received them at your side while fighting for the independence of my country, . . . your blood flowed the same day, my General; . . . it was at the Battle of Brandywine, which just missed being deadly for us." "Indeed it was a rough day," answered the General, "but let us agree that we have been well rewarded for it since." Lafayette was surely surprised and gratified to meet not just a fellow veteran of the Revolution but one who was in the battle that proved Lafayette's bravery to Washington and the Continental Army and launched Lafayette's military heroics

[36] Note: Miss Wright refers to Fanny Wright, a Scottish writer, reformer, and abolitionist who traveled to America with her sister Camilla to accompany Lafayette. Note they were not on the *Cadmus*, Lafayette's ship.
[37] Brandon, *A Pilgrimage of Liberty*, 210.
[38] Levasseur, *Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825*, 386.

in America. The old general gave the old soldier a manly hug before boarding the boat.[39]

The newspaper reported, "The witnesses of this incident will not forget it, and it is not necessary to say that the emotions of this old soldier, exhibited in the quivering lip and overflowing eye, found warm sympathy in the bosom of the philanthropic La Fayette.—The whole scene as it has occurred, seems like recollection of some fond dream."[40]

Lafayette's whirlwind visit to Natchez was a great success. The citizens of the city and its environs turned out en masse to welcome the "Guest of the Nation." Natchez provided the pomp and ceremony expected at the time and experienced over and over by Lafayette in other states. The city also added unique touches such as welcoming the general with a large group of children. In addition, the visit provided Lafayette with surprise encounters with a national guardsman from the French Revolution and a fellow soldier from the battle where the twenty-year-old Lafayette had proved his mettle.

In summarizing the stopover, the *Natchez Gazette* reported:

> [W]e have seen face to face the man who was among the first in the heart of Washington, who conversed with him, and who fought nobly, by his side for our sakes and who has asserted and maintained the same principles, for half a century, through persecution and cruelty; through protracted imprisonment, and heartless ingratitude unsurpassed in the annals of the world—but how small and unimportant, or rather, how consoling and delightful, must not the recollection of such scenes be, when this virtuous man is listening to the voice of ten millions of freemen, hailing him as their benefactor and Father—he has lived, and may he many years yet live to prove that "Virtue is its own reward."[41]

[39] Ibid., 387.
[40] Brandon, *A Pilgrimage of Liberty*, 210.
[41] Ibid.

Levasseur observed, "On withdrawing from Natchez, we parted from the civilized world."[42] Lafayette and company spent ten days on the Mississippi River until their next stop in St. Louis, where former territorial Governor William Clark of Lewis and Clark fame welcomed them. The French hero finally departed for home from Washington, D.C. on September 8, 1825, five months after the day he spent in Natchez. He traveled on a new navy ship named *Brandywine* in his honor.[43]

Numerous places in the United States are named in honor of General Lafayette, such as Fayetteville, North Carolina, and West Lafayette, Indiana. Mississippi is no exception. Lafayette County, the home of Oxford, and Fayette, the county seat of Jefferson County, both pay homage to the great man.

One known artifact exists from the Natchez visit. Lafayette had a walking stick with a silverplated handle that he left as a present for Governor Walter Leake. It was donated to the Mississippi Department of Archives and History in 1910 by the governor's great granddaughter, Mrs. B. C. (Mary Agnes) Buckley,[44] and is on display in the Museum of Mississippi History in Jackson. Today this cane is a reminder of that special day in history when the Marquis de Lafayette, the last surviving general of the American Revolution and hero of two worlds, walked the streets of Natchez, Mississippi.

[42] Levasseur, *Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825*, 388.
[43] Duncan, *Hero of Two Worlds*, 400.
[44] "Once Property of General Lafayette," *Vicksburg Evening Post*, October 19, 1910.

2025 Mississippi Historical Society Award Winners

Civil rights and community activist Frank Figgers received the Lifetime Achievement Award from Michael Morris, director, Two Mississippi Museums.

The Mississippi Historical Society held its annual meeting March 6-7 in Jackson to honor its 2025 award winners, including presenting the Lifetime Achievement Award to Frank Figgers, a lifelong civil rights and community activist.

Awards were also given for Book of the Year, Journal of Mississippi History Article of the Year, and Teacher of the Year at the gathering that drew nearly 200 people to the Two Mississippi Museums.

Figgers was active in the Civil Rights Movement while a student at Lanier High School and Tougaloo College. Later at Jackson State University, Figgers preserved stories of civil rights activism through oral histories, and he led the interpretation and preservation of M.W. Stringer Lodge, which housed the office of Medgar Evers. The lodge also was the site of numerous significant events during the movement, including the convention of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

Wright Thompson, senior writer for ESPN.com and ESPN The Magazine, received the Book of the Year Award for *The Barn: A Secret History of a Murder in Mississippi*. The book examines the death of Emmett Till in 1955 and provides a wide social, political, and cultural context for understanding the role of place in history.

Eve Wade, a history teacher in Chicago, received the Journal of Mississippi History Article of the Year Award for "Look for Me in the Spring: Migration Clubs and the Black Metropolis," which examines

the movement of African Americans from Mississippi to Chicago in the early twentieth century.

Rory Rafferty Jr. and Pamela Dupuy of the Pass Christian Historical Society accepted the Outstanding Local Historical Society Award from Rebecca Tuuri, MHS president.

Christina Thomas of Johns Hopkins University won the Outstanding Dissertation Award for *What Shall We Teach Our Students Who Are Black?: The Intellectual Biography of Geraldine L. Wilson*. Jerra Runnels of the University of Southern Mississippi won the Outstanding Thesis Award for "Black Women in Hattiesburg During World War II."

The Outstanding Local Historical Society Award was presented to the Pass Christian Historical Society. The Teacher of the Year Award was presented to Carlous Smith of Florence Middle School.

Awards of Merit were presented to the Black History Gallery for preserving the history of the Civil Rights Movement in McComb; Bridging Winona for commemorating the life of Fannie Lou Hamer; Catherine C. Myers for compiling a book on the history of Pass Christian; the City of Ridgeland for creating the Ridgeland History Trail as part of the city's celebration of 125 years; Eddie and Frank Thomas for compiling the book, *Miss Lyla's Papers: A Posthumous History of Iuka, Mississippi*; Jackson State University president Marcus L. Thompson for his leadership on historic preservation at the school; DeeDee Baldwin for researching and creating a website, *Against All Odds*, about the first African American legislators in Mississippi during Reconstruction; the Dr. Jane Ellen McAllister

Carlous Smith, Florence Middle School, accepted the MHS Teacher of the Year Award from Kari Baker, MDAH director of education.

House Foundation for organizing a symposium on the 125th birthday of McAllister of Vicksburg, who was the first African American woman in the United States to earn a Ph.D. in education; the Lafayette Community Remembrance Project for its memorialization work around historical racial injustice; the Laurel Black History Project for its work to expand knowledge about the history of Laurel's Black community; Mississippi Heritage Trust for its work collecting, documenting, and preserving Freedom Houses; the Monroe County Rosenwald Schools Initiative for its work to preserve the story of Rosenwald Schools; the Neshoba Youth Coalition for commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of Freedom Summer; and the Simpson County Bicentennial Executive Committee and Simpson County Historical and Genealogical Society for organizing the celebration of the bicentennial of Simpson County.

Rebecca Tuuri, associate history professor at the University of Southern Mississippi, completed her term as president of the society and welcomed the new president, Roscoe Barnes III, cultural heritage tourism manager at Visit Natchez. Keena Graham, superintendent of the Medgar and Myrlie Evers Home National Monument, was elected vice president. New board members are Richard Damms, Mississippi State University-Meridian; Mandy Hornsby, City of Biloxi; Kristi Melancon, Mississippi College; John Spann, Mississippi Humanities Council; Stefanie Taylor, Alcorn State University; and Al Wheat, Mississippi Department of Education.

The Mississippi Historical Society, founded in 1858, encourages outstanding work in interpreting, teaching, and preserving Mississippi

history. Membership is open to anyone. Benefits include receiving the *Journal of Mississippi History*, the Mississippi History Newsletter, and discounts at the Mississippi Museum Store. For information on becoming a member, visit www.mississippihistory.org.

Program of the 2025 Mississippi Historical Society Annual Meeting

by William "Brother" Rogers

The Excellence in History Award was shared by the Mississippi Humanities Council and Visit Mississippi for expanding the Mississippi Freedom Trail that commemorates the people and places in the state that played a pivotal role in the Civil Rights Movement.

The Mississippi Historical Society (MHS) held its annual meeting March 6-7, 2025, at the Two Mississippi Museums in Jackson. The program began on Thursday morning, March 6, with the board meeting and the annual business meeting.

The opening luncheon session on March 6 was led by MHS president Rebecca Tuuri, associate professor of history at the University of Southern Mississippi. MDAH director Katie Blount welcomed participants and dedicated the meeting to Elbert R. Hilliard, the former director of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, who died on March 17, 2024. Hilliard served as the secretary-treasurer of the Mississippi Historical Society from 1973 to 2017.

The keynote speaker was Carlton W. Reeves, U.S. district judge for the Southern District of Mississippi. Reeves discussed how the state used to tell an inaccurate, incomplete narrative of Mississippi history that left out the achievements of African Americans and how the state has changed in his lifetime.

Daphne Chamberlain, chief program officer at the Emmett Till Interpretive Center and a past president of MHS, led the first afternoon session titled, "Breaking the Silence: The Emmett Till Interpretive

Center and the Journey to Truth-telling and Racial Healing." The panel included her colleagues Jessie Jaynes-Diming, Jay Rushing, and Benjamin Saulsberry.

Wright Thompson received the MHS Book of the Year Award from MHS board member Kristi DiClemente for The Barn: The Secret History of a Murder in Mississippi.

The second afternoon session was a panel on the history of Millsaps College moderated by Andrew Marion, assistant director for student engagement at the school. Panelists included Matthew Coleman and Connor Sutton. Coleman, a 2024 Millsaps College graduate, spoke about the school's involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. Sutton, a 2025 Millsaps College graduate, addressed the topic, "Digging Up the Past: The Exodus of JSU from State Street." Marion's topic was "Quiet Reckonings and Pathways for Future Inquiry at Millsaps College." In addition, he read a paper entitled "The Vision for Mississippi Wesleyan College" by Ricky James, dean of the chapel and director of church relations at Millsaps College.

The first morning session on March 7 focused on hidden stories in Mississippi history. Speakers included Cassandra Hawkins, Center for the Study of Southern Culture, University of Mississippi, whose topic was "Documenting the Voices of African American Women in Mississippi's Rural Communities"; Josh Forman, instructor,

Jerra Runnels, University of Southern Mississippi, received the Outstanding Thesis Award for "Black Women in Hattiesburg During World War II."

Christina Joy Thomas, Johns Hopkins University, received the Outstanding Dissertation Award from MHS board member Anne Marshall for What Shall We Teach Our Students Who Are Black?: The Intellectual Biography of Geraldine L. Wilson.

Mississippi State University, who spoke on "John Blommart and the American Revolution in Natchez;" and Christopher Slocombe, Brown Talbot College Preparatory School in Omaha, Nebraska, who discussed "Charles McDougall, Henry Halleck, and the Emergence of Modern Medical Infrastructure in the Civil War's Western Theater."

The final academic session, sponsored by the Mississippi Humanities Council, focused on the impact of John Dittmer's scholarship on civil rights in Mississippi. Dittmer, a history professor at DePauw University and former teacher at Tougaloo College, died in 2024. He was the author of the influential book, Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi. The panel was moderated by Robert Luckett, professor and director, Margaret Walker Center, Jackson State University. Speakers included Emilye Crosby, professor of history, State University of New York Geneseo; Francoise Hamlin, associate professor of history and Africana studies, Brown University; Christina Thomas, Mellon Visiting Scholar, Jackson State University; and William L. Woods, professor of history, Tougaloo College.

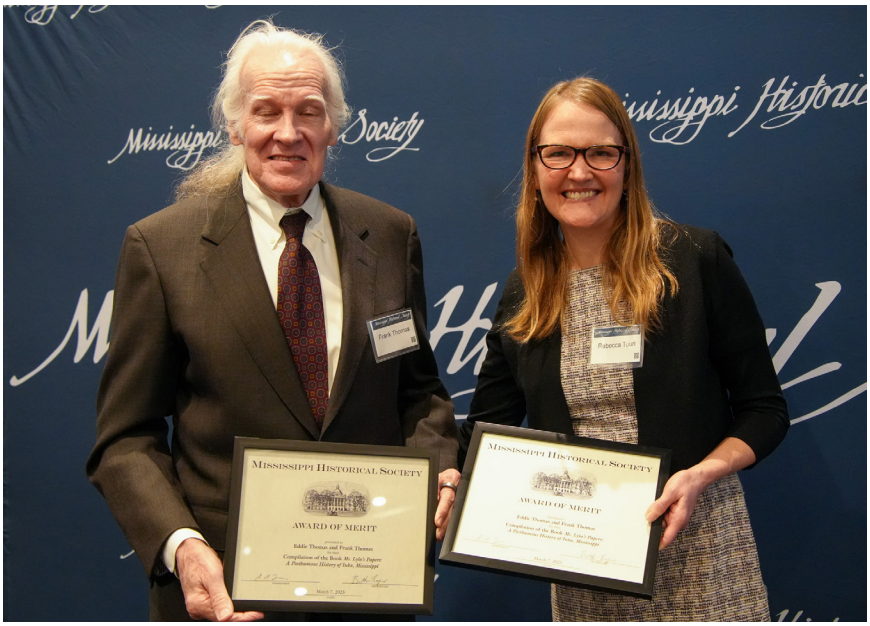
MHS president Rebecca Tuuri presided over the awards luncheon. Incoming president Roscoe Barnes III adjourned the meeting. Afternoon activities continued with optional tours of the Two Mississippi Museums, the Eudora Welty House & Garden, and the Medgar and Myrlie Evers Home National Monument.

Outgoing MHS president Rebecca Tuuri passes the gavel to incoming MHS president Roscoe Barnes III.

Kevin Brown accepted an Award of Merit presented to the Black History Gallery for preserving the history of the Civil Rights Movement in McComb with four Mississippi Freedom Trail markers.

Vickie Roberts Ratliff accepted an Award of Merit presented to Bridging Winona for commemorating the life of Fannie Lou Hamer with a Mississippi Freedom Trail Marker and theatrical performance of Voice of Freedom: Fannie Lou Hamer.

Mayor Gene McGee, along with Nancy Batson and Jim Woodrick, accepted an Award of Merit for the city of Ridgeland for creating the Ridgeland History Trail to celebrate the city's 125 years.



Frank Thomas accepted an Award of Merit for himself and his brother Eddie for compiling the book, Miss Lyla's Papers: A Posthumous History of Iuka, Mississippi. Lyla McDonald (1876-1962)*, documented her town's history throughout her life.*

DeeDee Baldwin of Mississippi State University received an Award of Merit for researching and creating a website, Against All Odds, about the first African American legislators in Mississippi during Reconstruction.

Betty J. Gardner accepted an Award of Merit for the Dr. Jane Ellen McAllister House Foundation for organizing a symposium on the 125th birthday of Dr. McAllister, the first African American woman in the U.S. to earn a Ph.D. in education.

The Lafayette Community Remembrance Project received an Award of Merit for its memorialization work around historical racial injustice in Mississippi. Accepting are Alonzo Hilliard, Gail Stratton, and Susan Marchant.

Derrion Arrington accepted an Award of Merit for The Laurel Black History Project for its work promoting the history of Laurel's Black community.

The Mississippi Heritage Trust received an Award of Merit for its work collecting, documenting, and preserving Freedom Houses in Mississippi.

The Monroe County Rosenwald Schools Initiative received an Award of Merit for its work to preserve and archive the story of Rosenwald Schools as part of Monroe County's African American history. Accepting are Earnestine Metcalf and Vyllorya Evans.

The Neshoba Youth Coalition received an Award of Merit for commemorating the 60th anniversary of Freedom Summer in Neshoba County and honoring the lives of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner.

The Simpson County Bicentennial Committee received an Award of Merit for organizing the celebration of the bicentennial of Simpson County.

Minutes of the 2025 Mississippi Historical Society Annual Business Meeting

March 6, 2025

The annual business meeting of the Mississippi Historical Society was held on Thursday, March 6, at 11 a.m. in the Community Room in the Two Mississippi Museums in Jackson, Mississippi.

Rebecca Tuuri, president, Mississippi Historical Society (MHS), presided at the business meeting. William "Brother" Rogers, secretary-treasurer, acted as secretary for the meeting. Isabella Suell, program officer in the Programs and Communication Division of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH), recorded the minutes.

The following business was transacted:

I. The president called the meeting to order at 11 a.m. and thanked everyone for attending.

II. The president asked that the minutes of the February 22, 2024, annual business meeting of the Mississippi Historical Society at the University of Mississippi be approved as distributed. A motion was made by Rory Rafferty, seconded by Jean Greene, and unanimously approved.

III. The secretary-treasurer provided a financial report for the Mississippi Historical Society. At the end of 2025, MHS had $57,475.99 in the operating account at Trustmark Bank. At the end of 2025, MHS had $279,395.60 in the Fidelity account, an increase of $36,938.44 for the entire year. The main expenses are the annual meeting, and publishing and mailing the Journal of Mississippi History. The main income is from membership dues, registration for the annual meeting, sponsors, and royalties from University Press of Mississippi. For 2025, MHS has a grant of $2,500 from the Mississippi Humanities Council to help with a panel on the civil rights scholarship of the late John Dittmer. Four entities from the University of Southern Mississippi gave $500 each as sponsors of the annual meeting.

IV. The president thanked Katie Blount, director, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, and MDAH staff, especially Caleb Ellison, Isabella Suell and Brother Rogers, for planning and organizing the annual meeting in Jackson. The president thanked the following sponsors from the University of Southern Mississippi: Center for the Study of the Gulf South, College of Arts and Sciences, School of Humanities, and Mississippi Digital Humanities Hub. She also thanked the Mississippi Humanities Council.

V. The president presented gifts to outgoing board members present: Barbie Boschert, Keena Graham, and Anne Marshall, and thanked them for their service. She also thanked TJ Taylor and Perry Sansing, departing board members who were not present.

VI. The secretary-treasurer presented an update on the Journal of Mississippi History. He stated that the publication has two issues per year: Spring/Summer and Fall/Winter. He announced a transition for the journal. Nathan Drake of Mississippi State University and Owen Hyman of the University of Mississippi will become co-editors starting in the fall semester of 2025. In addition, Millsaps professor and former MHS president Stephanie Rolph has agreed to oversee a special issue about America 250. The special issue will consider how Mississippi has changed in telling its own history since the American Bicentennial in 1976 and how Mississippi history has contributed to American history.

VII. The secretary-treasurer thanked Dr. John Marszalek, who was present and is the originator of the Heritage of Mississippi Series, which are books published by the University Press of Mississippi on different periods of Mississippi history. Jerry Nash's book on Reconstruction in Mississippi will be published later in 2025. The final book in the series will be on the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi and will be written by Charles C. Bolton from the University of North Carolina-Greensboro.

VIII. The secretary-treasurer presented an update on the Mississippi History Now website, which has more than 150 articles and lesson plans for students of Mississippi history. Three articles were published in 2024: "Okolona Industrial School" by Shaun Stalzer; "The Civil

Rights Movement in Natchez, Mississippi," by Roscoe Barnes III; and "A Brief History of Camp Shelby" by Caleb Ellison.

IX. The secretary-treasurer reported that the future sites for the annual meeting are every other year in Jackson, and so next year he proposes we host the annual meeting in Meridian. Out of town guests will stay at the Three Foot Hotel, attendees will meet at the on-campus Riley Center, and the banquet will be held at the MAX. The board has decided to hold 2028 at MSU/Starkville.

X. Kari Baker, MDAH director of education, presented an update on Mississippi History Day. The north Mississippi regional is at Mississippi University for Women, and the south Mississippi regional is at the University of Southern Mississippi. While the number of schools participating has decreased, this is not reflected in the number of projects made in class. A total of 337 students completed projects across that state, but not as many (only 58) presented at the regional contests. The state contest will be on April 5, 2025, at the Two Mississippi Museums, where students will compete to go to the national competition. Bently Cochran has been promoted at MDAH to fulltime Mississippi History Day Coordinator to increase the number of schools and students in the program.

XI. On behalf of Will Bowlin, chair, Nominations Committee, the president presented the following slate of new officers and board members:

President – Roscoe Barnes III, Visit Natchez

Vice President – Keene Graham, Medgar and Myrlie Evers Home National Monument

Secretary-Treasurer – Brother Rogers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History

The following six individuals were nominated to serve three-year terms on the Society's Board of Directors (2025-2028).

- Richard Damms, Mississippi State University
- Mandy Hornsby, City of Biloxi
- Kristi Melancon, Mississippi College
- John Spann, Mississippi Humanities Council
- Stefanie Taylor, Alcorn State University
- Al Wheat, Mississippi Department of Education

The president asked that the aforementioned slate of nominees be accepted by acclamation. Anne Webster made the motion, which was seconded by George Welch, and unanimously approved.

XII. Katie Blount, Director of MDAH, gave an update on activities at the state historical agency. She thanks MHS members for their work. She reported that MDAH had repatriated Native American remains to comply with the NAGPRA law. There are new projects underway to improve sites to the standard of the Two Mississippi Museums such as Windsor Ruins with restoration and new educational signage. At Grand Village of the Natchez Indians, MDAH will build a new museum and rebrand with a new name and exhibits, as well as outdoor interpretation, while working with Tribal partners to create an accurate interpretation. MDAH has plans to restore buildings at Historic Jefferson College and open a new museum. In addition, MDAH has had a pilot historic preservation field school at Historic Jefferson College with both Tulane University and Mississippi State University. MDAH is also creating a new Vicksburg Interpretation Center that is scheduled, tentatively, to open in 2028. Blount reported progress on demolition of the Eudora Welty Library to create a Crigler Park as a green space connecting the Two Mississippi Museums to State Street. She thanked the donors, members, sponsors, and all of those who contribute time to MDAH. She invited the attendees to visit the Hurricane Katrina Exhibit of photographs that opened on March 7.

XIII. In other business, the secretary-treasurer mentioned that this is the first time MHS has met in six decades without Elbert Hilliard. Due to his forty-four years as the secretary-treasurer for MHS, this annual meeting is dedicated to his memory. The president mentioned

recently deceased University of Mississippi professor Elizabeth Payne and her dedication to MHS. Anne Marshall informed members that the History Is Lunch program from the day before, March 5, about Mr. Hilliard is available for viewing on the MDAH YouTube channel. Keena Graham asked that Crigler Park have native plants and grasses and asked about the recovery of library items for a potential exhibit. Katie Blount stated that all salvageable contents are stored and assured that all plants will be native.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned by the president at 11:33 a.m.

Rebecca Tuuri
President

William "Brother" Rogers
Secretary-Treasurer

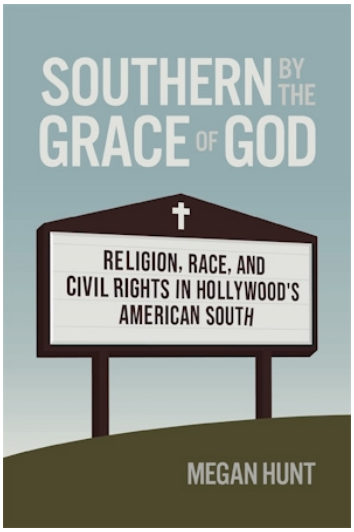
BOOK REVIEWS

Southern by the Grace of God: Religion, Race, and Civil Rights in Hollywood's American South

By Megan Hunt

(Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2024. Pp. 240. $29.99 paperback. ISBN: 978-0-8203-6762-0.)

Megan Hunt examines Hollywood's portrayal of the South and how its storylines underpin the cultural myths about its residents and struggles. She challenges American cinema's history of depicting the South as an isolated moral battleground, thereby reinforcing the notion that racism is a regional characteristic of southern exceptionalism rather than a national problem. Hunt also asserts that religion "is an understudied signifier of the South on film" (3). This book comprises over twenty pictures and provides several detailed synopses of key scenes to bolster its premise.



Hunt's critiques of *Mississippi Burning* (1988) and *A Time to Kill* (1996) exemplify Hollywood's "white savior complex" (138) of positioning White protagonists at the center of a plot. For instance, while *Mississippi Burning* dramatizes the FBI's investigation into the 1964 murders of three civil rights workers, its framing minimizes the actions of Black activists and community leaders who were essential to the movement. Such portrayals relegate Black characters to victims rather than active change agents. Furthermore, Hunt discusses the tendency (as in 1962's *To Kill a Mockingbird*) to represent poor Whites as the primary perpetrators of racism while the middle- and upper-class are viewed as non-participants or allies during pursuits of justice. She contends that these dichotomies oversimplify the complex social dynamics of the South and present a sanitized version of history that aligns with the sensibilities of mainstream White audiences. Accordingly, these tendencies suggest "that racial change occurred naturally in the United States or through the work of liberal, usually secular, whites" (53).

The book utilizes one of its most cited films, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, to highlight Hollywood's portrayal of southern religion juxtaposed with

racial conflict. While the lead character, Atticus Finch, embodies a sense of justice grounded in an implicit Christian ethic, the film avoids overt religious expression on his part. Instead, it contrasts his quiet morality with the more performative, and at times hypocritical, religiosity of the broader southern community. As with her assessment of *Ghosts of Mississippi* (1996), Hunt challenges White-centric narratives that focus on conflict within the White population based on class or religion. She also demonstrates how such portrayals reduce southern Christianity to either a force of oppression or a passive moral backdrop, rather than exploring its role as both a tool of resistance and complicity in racial struggles. In her analysis of *Cape Fear* (1991), Hunt emphasizes religious imagery and the antagonist's rhetoric to justify hostility towards an attorney and his family. This, Hunt argues, reflects Hollywood's tendency to depict southern religious figures as fanatical or morally ambiguous, which reinforces further negative stereotypes about the South's spiritual culture.

Southern by the Grace of God is a worthwhile contribution to the fields of film studies, southern culture, and American history. It critically analyzes American cinema's proclivities while also exploring elements such as the soundtracks used for setting the tone (such as contrasting traditional hymns with contemporary popular tunes). Hunt also incorporates adjacent narratives concerning the 1990s culture wars, the absence of Billy Graham's public stance against segregation, and films only loosely associated with the general subject matter, such as 1996's *Sling Blade*. Many readers will recognize brief mentions of Mississippi figures John Grisham, Jerry Mitchell, and Ted Ownby. Still, a criticism of the book is the absence of anything beyond 2014's *Selma*, which is peculiar for a 2024 publication. An extended scope would further the dialogue on how leading characters and plotlines have transitioned in more recent releases, such as a shift from Black subjugation to activism. Nonetheless, Hunt's work offers a compelling examination of southern identity and demonstrates how film continues to define the region's historical and cultural narratives well into the twenty-first century.

Will Bowlin
Northeast Mississippi Community College

His Truth is Marching On: John Lewis and the Power of Hope. By Jon Meacham. (New York: Random House, 2020. Afterword by John Lewis. Author's note and acknowledgments, appendix, notes, bibliography, illustrations, index. Pp. xii, 354. $30.00 cloth, $18.00 paper. ISBN: 0781984855022.)

John Lewis: In Search of the Beloved Community. By Raymond Arsenault. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2024. Preface, notes, sources, acknowledgments, index. Pp. xvi, 552. $35 cloth, $24 paper. ISBN: 9780300353757.)

John Lewis: A Life. By David Greenberg. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2024. Acknowledgments, notes, bibliography, illustrations, index. $35 cloth. ISBN: 9781982142995.)

For many Americans, John Lewis ranks second only to Martin Luther King, Jr. as the embodiment of the civil rights movement. Lewis participated in early sit-ins in Nashville, he was one of the original Freedom Riders, he chaired the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), he spoke at the 1963 March on Washington, and, when he led the first attempt to march from Selma to Montgomery, police beat him. Lewis's enduring reputation also benefits from his longevity; by living to 2020, he outlasted King, Rosa Parks, Fannie Lou Hamer, Stokely Carmichael, and Julian Bond. As a Georgia congressman from 1987 to 2020, Lewis also stayed in the nation's public eye longer than Robert Moses, James Lawson, or Andrew Young. And he provoked less controversy than Jesse Jackson.

Lewis has had good fortune in his first three biographers. In 2020, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author Jon Meacham wrote the first book-length study of Lewis, *His Truth Is Marching On: John Lewis and the Power of Hope*. It followed his earlier popular studies of Andrew Jackson, Thomas Jefferson, and George H. W. Bush, among his eight previous books. As a newspaper reporter, Meacham first met Lewis in 1992, and they maintained contact in subsequent years. For the biography Meacham interviewed Lewis, and Lewis contributed a three-page afterword. Meacham, in an "Author's Note" at the end of the book, concedes that he did not write "a full-scale biography" but "an appreciative account" (252). Even though he called Lewis a "prophet" and "a saint and a hero," he refused to characterize his account as "nostalgic" or "sentimental and overly grand" (7, 8). Instead, denying any "hyperbole," he compared Lewis favorably to the Founding Fathers, specifically Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and Samuel Adams (5). According to Meacham, Lewis "bent history to his will" (6).

Meacham rested his smooth, episodic narrative on light research. He interviewed only a dozen people in addition to Lewis, and he only cited two other interviews plus several from the *Eyes on the Prize* television documentary series. Except for a few government documents and one NAACP file on a lynching, Meacham reported no archival research. In addition to an odd group of four unpublished theses and dissertations, his bibliography included thirteen websites and half a dozen documentaries. Meacham left serious research to later scholars, and he graciously acknowledged that David Greenberg's work in progress would qualify as a "full-scale Lewis biography" (253).

In 2024, four years after Lewis's death, two full-length scholarly biographies appeared by well-established and respected historians. The two books will probably always be mentioned together. Nine months before Greenberg's anticipated volume, Yale University Press published Raymond Arsenault's

five hundred-page *John Lewis: In Search of the Beloved Community*. Arsenault, an emeritus professor of history at the University of South Florida, had written five earlier books; the biographical focus of three of them—Arkansas politician Jeff Davis, Black opera singer Marian Anderson, and Black tennis star Arthur Ashe—made him an experienced biographer. He gained a reputation as an expert on the civil rights movement with his prize-winning *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice* (2006). Arsenault's interest in Lewis grew out of his work on the Freedom Rides. In the biography, he declares that his "Freedom Riders paved the way" for his Lewis biography, and he "republish[es] and adapt[s] passages" from it (515).

Simon and Schuster published Greenberg's *John Lewis: A Life* in November 2024. With a background in journalism, Greenberg teaches history and media studies at Rutgers University. Primarily a student of political history, particularly the presidency, he followed his first book, *Nixon's Shadow: The History of an Image* (2003), with a brief biography of Calvin Coolidge and a broad gauged *Republic of Spin: An Inside History of the American Presidency* (2016). Before studying John Lewis, Greenberg had not worked in southern history or on the civil rights movement.

Although assessing the two scholarly biographies involves comparisons and contrasts, they, of course, agree on the major course of Lewis's life, from growing up in Troy, Alabama, through his work in the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Each book also covers Lewis's service with many nonprofit groups before he entered electoral politics with the Atlanta city council in the early 1980s and Congress in the later 1980s. Differences in the books emerge in considering five points: first, discussion of his personality and identity; second, treatment of Lewis's family; third, examination of his faith and ideas; fourth, coverage of his long career; and, fifth, research. The last topic requires a more careful discussion of four specific events.

First, the two biographers differ in their presentations of the person John Lewis. Candidly, Arsenault writes of his intellectual and emotional connections with Lewis during their twenty years of friendship. Though trying to "avoid hagiography and hero worship," Arsenault calls Lewis a "transcendent historical figure" comparable to King and Frederick Douglass, and he says Lewis had an "unparalleled reputation as a man of courage and conscience" (x, xiv, 447). The idealistic Lewis dreamed of "a new, morally awakened America," and his principled stands as a representative earned him the reputation as "the conscience of Congress" (a chapter title) (376). Some people even thought he was a saint. Arsenault's respect and admiration for Lewis keeps his biography quite positive. He notes Lewis's reputation for being an effective "hands-on leader personally connected to the bone and marrow of the struggle" (167). While Lewis could be tough, as in his speech at the March on Washington, he had a calm, "gentle and forgiving

nature" (171). Arsenault recognized that Lewis could be "lonely and homesick" while working in New York City, experienced frustration, disappointment, and despair in Congress, and had nostalgia in his later years for the movement days (264). Though he recognizes that Lewis came close to a "breaking point" at the time of King's funeral and later in 1968 was hospitalized for "severe fatigue and nervous exhaustion," Arsenault demonstrates that Lewis overcame his troubled moments (273, 278). Arsenault also briefly recognizes Lewis's critics but does not develop their charges against him. Overall, however, Arsenault presents a heroic John Lewis.

In Greenberg's more balanced view, Lewis has the same characteristics but also many insecurities. Lewis worried about his unsophisticated rural background, his country accent, his unpolished speaking style, and his lack of education. Greenberg suggests that Lewis sometimes hid his supposed inadequacies by remaining silent in meetings. More than Arsenault, Greenberg also gives voice to Lewis's critics, without commenting on their accuracy. Opponents on the Atlanta city council, for example, saw him as a polarizing figure because of his irritating moralism, self-righteousness, inflexibility, and self-promotion, and Greenberg entitles one chapter "Ambitions" (439).

Far more than Arsenault, Greenberg develops a complicated John Lewis. He explains that Lewis shared his wife Lillian's passion for shopping and that he avidly collected art, which Lewis called his "greatest extravagance" (468). With a preference for African American art, he owned several paintings by Romare Bearden. The Lewis home contained more than four hundred pieces of art. Lewis also shopped for antiques, gardened, collected stamps, played Scrabble, watched the Atlanta Braves, and bought a weekly lottery ticket. He also enjoyed laughing and teasing around his office. In Greenberg's warm portrait, Lewis had "unfeigned humility" and sufficient modesty to discount his own reputation as a saint and the "Conscience of the Congress" (a chapter title) (516). At the same time, Lewis combined "selfless activism" with "self-promotion" (306). Greenberg shows that Lewis and his staff cultivated publicity to keep alive memories of the movement and his brave role in it. Lewis became a "rock star" as his fame and celebrity as a civil rights icon grew later in his life (493).

Second, Lewis's family life—first with his parents and then with his wife and son—forms a major part of his life. His biographers describe Lewis's break with his parents who opposed his early civil rights activities, particularly his publicized arrests. Neither Arsenault nor Greenberg pursues the ties between Lewis and his parents, who later seldom appear in either book. Each writer pays more attention to Lillian, Lewis's wife, and Miles, their adopted son, but Greenberg presents greater detail and analysis. He describes Lillian's "steely" and "brisk" personality, the impact of her limitless ambitions for her husband and his career, and her influence over his congressional staff (311). Greenberg

also follows more closely her declining health and Lewis's concern for her. Miles Lewis appears only rarely and hazily in Arsenault's book (only four mentions), but Greenberg describes Lewis's frustrations and disappointments with his son, Miles's learning disability, his failure to finish college, his brush with the law as a teenager, and his later care for his dying father. Greenberg's more extensive interviews about Lewis's life after the Freedom Rides enable his richer description of Lewis's family.

Third, from childhood, religion formed a key element in Lewis's life. In Arsenault's preface, he declares his interest in the "personal and interior aspects" of Lewis's life, including his "thoughts, feelings, and character," and Greenberg clearly has a similar intent (ix). Each biographer discusses Lewis's preaching to the family's chickens when he was a child. Greenberg explains the importance of faith in Lewis's family, especially for his mother, and for John who always wanted to be a minister. They also tell the important story of John's hearing on a Montgomery radio station a sermon by Martin Luther King; Arsenault says that in 1955 it "initiated a spiritual awakening that would change his life forever," and Greenberg agrees (25). In a note, however, Greenberg dates the sermon in June 1958, yet in his text he also awkwardly places it in early 1955 before the Montgomery bus boycott. Despite the problematic chronology, for Lewis, King connected the gospel and racial equality and became Lewis's role model.

More than Greenberg, Arsenault shows interest in and sensitivity to Lewis's developing faith. At American Baptist Theological Seminary in the late 1950s, according to Arsenault, Lewis drifted away from his faith and by 1960 no longer wanted to be a preacher. "Emotionally and intellectually, Lewis caught fire" in James Lawson's workshops on nonviolence, and Arsenault calls Lewis's first arrest in a demonstration "a pivotal life-changing experience and a spiritual rite of passage" (41, 55). His faith shifted away from the traditional Black church to the social gospel applied in the struggle for equal rights. Arsenault says that Lewis's "commitment to the nonviolent struggle . . . was complete and unreserved" (72), and Greenberg says that King thought Lewis was "Lawson's purest disciple" (97). Later Lewis even wrote about the nonviolent movement as, according to Arsenault, "a religious phenomenon" (268). Lewis's beliefs qualified him for the draft designation as a conscientious objector. Neither Arsenault nor Greenberg explores Lewis's faith or his relationship with the church as an older adult. They also do not examine the nature or quality of his thinking in what Arsenault calls his "philosophical essays" collected in 2012 as *Across the Bridge: A Vision for Change and the Future of America* (394).

Fourth, both Arsenault and Greenberg cover the contours of Lewis's long life from his civil rights work through his post-movement days working for the Marshall Field Foundation in New York, for the Southern Regional Council and the Voter Education Project in Atlanta, with ACTION in Washington, on the

Atlanta city council, and for more than thirty years as a congressman. A few discrepancies between the two books result simply from Greenberg's more extensive research that allows him to explore more than Arsenault. For example, Greenberg devotes a chapter to Nashville's "Open City" campaign in 1963. Writing before Arsenault's book appeared, Greenberg points out that other scholars, and even Lewis's own autobiography, neglected the movement's successes in Nashville in 1963; Arsenault discusses the events but not with Greenberg's detail and insight. In another example, for twenty pages Greenberg follows Lewis's extensive 1964 trip to Africa, while Arsenault mentions it in a handful of pages. Arsenault also covers Lewis's lonely time working in New York in a few pages, while Greenberg has a chapter entitled "Lost in New York" (256). A similar difference appears when Arsenault covers Lewis's six years with the Voter Education Project in the 1970s in six pages, while Greenberg devotes most of a chapter to the same period. In scope and concentration, the greatest disparity between the biographies occurs in their coverage of Lewis's time in Congress, from 1987 to his death in 2020. Nearly one-third of Arsenault's book deals with Congressman Lewis, while almost one-half of Greenberg's one hundred pages-longer volume covers the same period. Despite their differences, the biographies' coverages of Lewis's post-movement days make valuable contributions to knowledge about John Lewis's full career.

Fifth, as for the research that forms the bases for the books, each author conducted extensive work in a variety of sources, as Arsenault's fifty-seven pages and Greenberg's seventy pages of endnotes attest. While Arsenault provides a five-page note on his sources, twenty-three pages list Greenberg's sources. He draws on more than two hundred interviews, most conducted for his Freedom Rides book, but he does not list them or tell how many he did primarily for the biography. The rides concluded in the early 1960s, so how and why the interviewees spoke to the latter half-century of Lewis's career remains unknown. Greenberg lists more than two hundred fifty interviews and provides a date for each one in his endnotes.

The books raise general questions about how historians use oral history research. Both authors, for example, present quotations from later reminiscences as though they had been spoken at the time of the events described; with hindsight the comments can make the speaker look falsely prescient and even wise. More than Arsenault, Greenberg uses other sources and interviews with multiple subjects to test the accuracy of his oral histories. In one case, for example, he checks Lewis's memory of when he first met James Lawson by asking Lawson the same question, and Greenberg concludes that Lewis misremembered, and Lewis later agreed. Greenberg also concedes unresolvable inaccuracies and even confusion when multiple interviews disagree, such as where Lewis had engaged in a sit-in during a Nashville demonstration. Less critical of oral sources, Arsenault

even accepts that Lewis and an uncle in 1951 drove from Troy, Alabama, to Buffalo, New York, in a mere seventeen hours, an unlikely average of 58 miles per hour before interstate highways. (Greenberg makes a similar slip when he reports that Lewis had "a brain scan" in 1965, years before the technology was available [224].)

Both books offer intimidating bulky notes. Greenberg's many citations within individual notes demonstrate his wide and deep research in newspapers and privately held archives. They also often clarify disagreements among his sources. For example, he sorts out differing accounts of whether Lewis attended the founding of the SNCC (he did not) and how many people did attend (he concludes 126). Arsenault's notes reveal his heavy dependence on Lewis's 1998 *Walking With the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement*; at least the first half of Arsenault's book closely tracks Lewis's book. Many of Arsenault's lengthy content endnotes, however, consist primarily of references to secondary sources related to topics discussed in the text. One of his notes refers to a major archival source, the files of the Voter Education Project that Lewis directed for half a dozen years, but Arsenault apparently did not consult it.

Examination of several discrete but perhaps more significant subjects reveals the effects of their differences in research and how, perhaps as a result, the two authors sometimes even disagree in important ways. One classic movement story recalls Martin Luther King and other SCLC leaders, gathered in the home of a Selma dentist, listening to President Lyndon B. Johnson's 1965 speech to Congress urging passage of federal voting rights legislation. Arsenault reports that Lewis watched on television with King and others as LBJ said, "And we shall overcome," and Lewis saw King shed a tear of joy. Greenberg, however, explains how Lewis's accounts of the event varied. In 1973, Lewis had said that he understood that King had shed a tear, in 1979, he had declared he had been in Selma at the time and suggested he had not been with King, but by 1983 and 1995 he claimed that he had sat with King when they watched the speech. Greenberg concludes, "Lewis was watching elsewhere," not with King, so he did not see the tear (228).

Another powerful moment in Lewis's life involved his 1979 meeting with the old and paralyzed George Wallace. In an endnote, Arsenault offers the conventional account of the event: "a repentant George Wallace, the governor largely responsible for Bloody Sunday, requested a meeting with Lewis to ask for his 'forgiveness for anything I've done to wrong you.' . . . the former adversaries 'grasped hands and prayed together.'" According to Arsenault, "As Lewis later described the scene, 'It was almost like someone confessing to a priest'" (483 n. 12). Based on a 2023 interview with Archie Allen, Lewis's close friend, Greenberg tells quite a different story. On a visit to Alabama, Allen and Lewis discussed meeting with Wallace, and Allen made the arrangements. The private meeting

occurred in Wallace's Montgomery office. Based on Allen's taped interview with Lewis immediately after the visit, Greenberg says, "Wallace's comments were far short of penitent or apologetic" (335). About Wallace's statements, Lewis said, "I thought it was shallow, hollow, and it just did not ring right" (336). A decade later, Lewis had a different recollection of the meeting, and in a 2020 interview with Greenberg, a colleague of Lewis remembered his 1979 report of the meeting as more in line with the conventional story. Neither Arsenault nor Greenberg proves his version, of course, but Greenberg's research does raise serious questions about the accuracy of the usual account.

Their coverage of the 1987 congressional election between Lewis and his friend Julian Bond also demonstrates the effects of their research. What Arsenault ably summarizes in eight pages receives a full chapter of twenty-four pages from Greenberg. The longer treatment allowed Greenberg to develop a narrative about the two distinct personalities and the controversial issues in the campaign. It pitted the graceful, polished, educated, and arrogant Bond against the scrappy, hard-working, insecure and "untutored farm boy" Lewis (364). In a series of debates described by Greenberg, the candidates faced the campaign's major issues—Bond's alleged drug use, accusations of corruption involving Lewis, and competition for support in the Black and White communities. According to Greenberg, "the mud flew" (376). As a political historian, Greenberg seemed to relish describing the election, which Lewis won in a run-off.

A final example of specific differences between the two biographies comes from Lewis's experiences as a congressman. According to Arsenault, when the National Museum of African American History and Culture opened in September 2016, Lewis "experienced one of the most satisfying days of his congressional career" because he had championed the project since 1987 (423). Arsenault covers the effort from beginning to end in two paragraphs. Greenberg, however, follows Lewis's struggle for the museum in more depth. As its "chief advocate," he rallied "a team that was biracial, bipartisan, and bicameral" and overcame opposition from the White House, conservatives, Washington preservationists, and even the Smithsonian Institution (459, 461).

In the last two hundred pages after the civil rights movement, which is Arsenault's strength, his biography loses momentum. Largely lacking the guidance of Lewis's 1998 autobiography, it becomes sometimes a recitation of Lewis's usually predictable liberal opinions on major political issues during the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations. Greenberg, in contrast, excels in covering Lewis's congressional career, and he also uses his extensive research to craft a fine narrative of Lewis in the movement.

Though both authors deeply respect their subject, Arsenault seems more adoring and less critical. Only eight years younger than Lewis, Arsenault grew up during the civil rights movement and identifies with the movement and Lewis. Twenty

years younger and born after the movement's heyday, Greenberg brings greater detachment to his work. His perspective combines with his more comprehensive research to produce the better biography. If Arsenault's biography alone had appeared in 2024, it would have stood as the respected first major scholarly book on John Lewis, but Arsenault did not have such good fortune. Instead, Greenberg's biography came several months later and eclipsed Arsenault's book. More people, nevertheless, will probably read Jon Meacham's popular account than either of the scholarly biographies by Arsenault or Greenberg.

Charles W. Eagles
University of Mississippi, emeritus

A Slow Calculated Lynching: The Story of Clyde Kennard. By Devery S. Anderson. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2023. Acknowledgments, photographs, bibliography index. Pp. xviii, 352. $35 cloth. ISBN: 9781496844040.)

Devery S. Anderson, author of a work on Emmett Till's murder and a documentarian of Mormon history, offers an engrossing and agonizing account of one man's quiet but determined resistance to racial injustice in Jim Crow Mississippi. Based on sixty interviews, court records, archival collections, and secondary sources, Anderson tells the largely forgotten story of Clyde Kennard, an African American who attempted to integrate Mississippi Southern College (MSC), now the University of Southern Mississippi (USM), in the late 1950s. Anderson also sheds light on the insidious workings of White officials to prevent Kennard's matriculation for the sake of protecting White supremacy. This work tells the story of a very honorable man who deserved his chance at the American dream but was legally crucified by Mississippi officials. Kennard ironically died on July 4, 1963, and many Mississippi officials wanted his story to die with him. It did not! Anderson chronicles the efforts of sympathetic Blacks and Whites who later revived Kennard's story and achieved a measure of reckoning and reconciliation.

Kennard, a native of Hattiesburg, was, from all accounts, a quiet-spoken, intelligent man who aspired to move beyond the limitations of Jim Crow Mississippi. In 1945, aged eighteen, he joined the U.S. Army. He later served as a paratrooper during the Korean War. Kennard passed his GED while in the Army, and later he earned college credits as a political science major at the University of Chicago. Once discharged, he returned to Mississippi, hoping to complete his academic degree. Kennard lived too far from the historically Black colleges in Mississippi, and he thought it logical that he should be able to matriculate to MSC, the all-White institution just a few miles from his home. Kennard's determination to attend MSC would adversely affect his life and help change the history of Mississippi.

Kennard did not realize the depths to which the Mississippi White power structure would plummet to thwart his efforts. And this

is what makes his struggle so heartbreaking and chilling. Multiple levels of the government of Mississippi were weaponized against Kennard to prevent his acceptance into the college. Public officials, including the governor, law enforcement officers, and even MSC's president, banded together to devise strategies to rebuff Kennard's efforts. Ultimately, local law officials framed Kennard over the theft of twenty-five dollars worth of chicken feed, and the court sentenced Kennard to an eight-year prison sentence in Parchman, the state's maximum-security facility. Kennard already exhibited early symptoms of cancer before entering prison, and yet the warden denied him access to proper treatment. Kennard also endured the physical hardship of working in the prison's cotton fields. Eventually, as his health declined, Governor Ross Barnett worried that he would die in custody and put the state in a further bad light, so he granted Kennard clemency. He was released in January 1963. The cancer took his life several months later.

Anderson uses the title, *A Slow Calculated Lynching*, to describe the chilling nature of the assault by state and local officials upon Kennard. While a racist mob did not violently attack him and lynch him as many other African Americans experienced, public officials slowly and systematically bludgeoned Kennard through character assassination, legal chicanery, false imprisonment, and medical neglect. Kennard's story differs greatly from victims of racial violence such as Emmett Till, yet Mississippi officials suffocated Kennard's hopes and dreams, as well as his life, just the same.

In the latter part of the work, Anderson meticulously details how sympathetic African Americans and Whites worked from the 1990s into the early 2000s to clear Kennard's name. A diverse cast of actors, including an award-winning Mississippi journalist, Black educators at USM, Kennard family members, and White high school students, gathered information to petition Mississippi legal officials to act on Kennard's behalf. These efforts resulted in Kennard's guilty verdict being overturned in 2006.

One comes away from Anderson's account with admiration for Clyde Kennard and deep sympathy for his desire and dream that led to the destruction of his very life. The reader also cringes at the criminal and inhuman conspiracy by a host of Mississippi officials who used the full power of the state to destroy a man's life only because he was the wrong color. Finally, the reader takes a measure of hope from the book as a multiracial coalition of sympathetic Americans fought to restore Kennard's innocence and reputation and live up to the American ideals of equality and opportunity.

Jeffery B. Howell
East Georgia State College

Building Dutch Air Power in World War II: The Role of Lend-lease and Aircrew Training in the United States. By Nicholas Michael Sambaluk. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc, 2025. Illustrations, timeline, notes, bibliography, index. Pp. 266. $49.95 paper. ISBN: 9781476696133.)

The history of Jackson, Mississippi's Dutch flyers sparked my interest during college because it was a remarkable story with international allure that had remained relatively untold. I began researching and writing about the Royal Netherlands Military Flying School (RNMFS) at Belhaven University. I returned to the subject at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH) with my colleague Will Morgan. Our project resulted in three "History Is Lunch" lecture series presentations at MDAH, a Journal of Mississippi History article, and a Mississippi Public Broadcasting documentary. We always believed that this extraordinary story deserved a full-length book.

This work seeks to place the RNMFS in the wider context of World War II and other foreign training schools in the United States, but it puts Jackson squarely at the center of the story. Sambaluk identified something unique about the Dutch training effort. Unlike most other Lend-Lease training partners, the Dutch had plenty of money but no space. Sambaluk explores this dynamic, centering the Dutch air force (and its temporary Mississippi home) as a comparatively small player caught up in global events and coalitions largely outside their control.

The first several chapters provide a sweeping summary and cogent analysis of global events leading to the war. Sambaluk does not get mired in the minutiae of foreign policy but delivers a readable account of the political and strategic situation. He provides an insightful analysis of Dutch colonial objectives, including problems with the burgeoning nationalist movement in the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) during the pre-war period. The NEI provided the Dutch with huge financial dividends. The primary reason that the Dutch (and the Americans who were supporting them) and the Japanese coveted control of the NEI was for its oil, rubber, and other natural resources. Sambaluk follows this thread throughout the narrative, exploring both the strategic implications of the NEI as well as the Indonesian nationalists' position during the war. He points out that the nationalists did not necessarily express pro-Japanese sentiments during the Japanese invasion and occupation.

The author is a military historian at the Air War College at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, and his exploration of military strategy and policy is superb. He systematically explores tactical developments such as aviation technology and the evolution of carrier-based aircraft. The level of research is impressive, spanning Japanese Kempeitai reports, local newspa-

pers, correspondence, and military and diplomatic records. General readers, however, may get bogged down in the narrative's statistics. Sambaluk continually places local activities in Mississippi within the global context of the war. There is excellent coverage of the flying school in Jackson, from local reactions and race relations to the social and cultural implications of the foreigners in residence. The RNMFS contingent included descendants of Dutch and Indonesian intermarriages, ethnic Indonesians, and Chinese. Most hailed from the multi-cultural NEI, whose racial mores were less rigid than Mississippi's. At first, RNMFS aviators attended the segregated social functions of both races in Mississippi, provoking hostile reactions from the White community. Despite Dutch protests, they eventually acquiesced to attend White-only functions as the foreigners were all deemed to be "white" by the bizarre calculus of Jim Crow segregation.

The author examines the combat actions of Jackson-trained flight crews, especially in the NEI and Australia, where most of the RNMFS graduates were stationed. Altogether, the RNMFS trained a total of 532 pilots, crew, and other personnel, the fifth-largest foreign training program during the war. The Pacific-bound aviators deployed with B-25 bombers and P-40 fighters, flying from bases in Australia and later Dutch New Guinea. Others rejoined their countrymen in British units fighting to reclaim Holland, although more information about this aspect of the story would have been useful.

Sambaluk deftly tells the complex and gripping saga of the post-war colonial breakdown in the NEI and the Indonesian independence struggle. Some Jackson-trained aviators fought for the independence movement while others served with Dutch re-occupation forces; others simply wanted to evacuate their families. Sambaluk gives the struggle its due as a significant colonial breakup of the period.

Overall, this book fills a gap in the historiography of the RNMFS. Sambaluk is a gifted writer, who brings the story to life using primary source material. I revisited familiar figures from our earlier project and discovered many new facets of this remarkable story

Amanda (Lyons) Lanata
Baton Rogue, Lousiana

Spying on Students: The FBI, Red Squads, and Student Activists in the 1960s South. By Gregg L. Michel. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press. 2024. Acknowledgements, photographs, notes, bibliography, index. Pp. xi, 280. $45, hardcover. ISBN: 9780807182222.)

Gregg L. Michel is a professor of history at the University of Texas at San Antonio where he specializes in social movements and the American South. His book provides a meticulously documented account of law enforcement's surveillance of student activists in the American South during the 1960s. Using declassified FBI files, city police records, and personal interviews, Michel unpacks the development and deployment of federal and local surveillance apparatuses in response to what authorities perceived as threats to national security and public order. The book's conclusions present a critical challenge to law enforcement professionals, prompting reflection on balancing security imperatives with constitutional rights.

From a national security and policing standpoint, Michel's work illuminates an understudied theater of domestic countersubversion: the regional South. While scholarly attention has focused on federal activities in urban centers like New York City, Chicago, or the San Francisco Bay area, Michel explores how the national security state filtered into southern cities, spaces often considered peripheral to national debates surrounding student surveillance. As Michel reveals, these areas were hotbeds of student protest against segregation, the Vietnam War, and broader institutional injustices, and became targets for government scrutiny under the assumption that such unrest indicated possible communist influence or subversion.

The book reveals the intrusive and sometimes unconstitutional tactics used by law enforcement agencies. Michel provides compelling examples of wiretapping, informant placement, and efforts to destabilize activist groups through psychological and legal manipulation and bureaucratic entanglements. He demonstrates how some agencies, like the Memphis Police Department's Domestic Intelligence Unit, the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission, and the Mississippi Highway Patrol, operated with limited oversight, driven by a mindset that framed dissent as dangerous. These were not simply rogue actors, but institutions empowered by ambiguous mandates and evolving interpretations of what constituted threats.

In Mississippi, *Spying on Students* makes a vital contribution by uncovering how state agencies collaborated with private entities to monitor, infiltrate, and disrupt student activism at leading universities. Michel examines dissent expressed through publications such as *The Kudzu*, an underground newspaper founded by activists at Millsaps College who organized youth festivals and published articles criticizing official policies. He reveals how this activism, along with similar efforts in student newspapers at Mississippi State University and the University of Mississippi, were criminalized

and policed through surveillance, intimidation, and the manipulation of drug laws. Acting under the pretense of anti-crime and law and order, Mississippi Governor John Bell Williams tasked the Sovereignty Commission with investigating student disturbances and drug use; rather than targeting students for their political views, "the commission used drug charges to try to undermine their work" (99). This manipulation of drug laws mirrored the targeted policing of the War on Crime and the War on Drugs under the administrations of Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard M. Nixon, respectively.

Michel's work acknowledges the turbulent context in which these actions occurred. The 1960s witnessed immense social upheaval and violence; bombings, political assassinations, and deadly riots occurred frequently. For those charged with maintaining public order and safeguarding national security, the boundary between civil protest and violent insurgency was often blurred. Intelligence and law enforcement communities were under intense pressure to act preemptively to prevent chaos and foreign exploitation of domestic unrest. What some might have called "infiltration" and "surveillance" were, from another perspective, viewed as proactive intelligence gathering tools that, when used properly, mitigated violent escalation. However, Michel shows how easily these tools were misapplied, particularly in a decentralized environment where local and federal law enforcement agencies shared information but received little strategic oversight.

Spying on Students forces a necessary conversation about the culture of policing and intelligence work, illustrating the risks of groupthink and ideological bias within national security agencies. These are concepts that scholars and law enforcement professionals today would do well to study as a warning of what happens when fear outpaces law and when broad notions of alleged subversion replace concrete indicators of threat. Michel's analysis resonates amid today's renewed student activism and debates over academic freedom, offering a sobering reminder that authorities have long used state-sponsored repression of campus protests to silence challenges to entrenched power in the United States.

While *Spying on Students* holds value to those interested in the history of policing in the United States, the book would be especially valuable to students enrolled in classes on southern history or civil rights. For students in a national security course, the book offers a critical lens through which to analyze domestic intelligence practices and the tension between security and civil liberties. It encourages debate over what constitutes a legitimate threat and helps equip students to think historically and critically about the boundaries of state power in democratic societies.

Ryan Reynolds
The University of Alabama in Huntsville

Grant, Lincoln, and the Freedmen: Reminiscences of the Civil War by John Eaton. Edited by Micheal J. Larson and John David Smith. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2022. Illustrations, acknowledgements, introduction, preface, biographical sketch, appendix, bibliography, index. Pp. xciv, 338. $55 Hardcover. ISBN: 9781621906575.)

Originally published in 1907, John Eaton's *Grant, Lincoln, and the Freedmen* has been a valuable resource for historians grappling with the complexities of federal efforts to house, feed, protect, educate, and employ thousands of enslaved people who escaped the horrors of slavery during the Civil War. As Superintendent of Freedmen in the Mississippi Valley, Eaton oversaw all aspects of the refugee camps in the region. His reminiscences provide a nuanced look at the practical challenges of creating and managing such an operation and include freedpeople's considerable role in defining what freedom would entail. The reminiscences span the Civil War and Reconstruction years, and Eaton, whose position allowed him to foster a friendship with General Ulysses S. Grant and gain access to President Abraham Lincoln, painted detailed, textured portraits of both men. This new edition of Eaton's influential work has been skillfully edited and annotated by Micheal J. Larson and John David Smith for the University of Tennessee Press's Voices of the Civil War series.

The appearance of a scholarly edition of Eaton's reminiscences is indicative of a historiographical shift within Civil War studies toward a more complex, inclusive, and less triumphant understanding of the conflict. Broadly considered, this literature emphasizes contingency and uncertainty and complicates the period's traditionally linear meta-narrative, emphasizing that events like emancipation were actually a process, and a disjointed and often perilous one at that. Because Eaton's well-written account drives home just how untidy the transition from slavery to freedom truly was, it is considered, as editors Larson and Smith emphasize, "a classic text in the historiography of the emancipation process" (liv).

Larson and Smith bring Eaton and his words to life for scholars and general audiences. Readers are treated to a robust 52-page introduction to Eaton's background, worldview, wartime work, Freedman's Bureau experience, and important post-war contributions in education. The editors provide essential context for each of these subjects but pay particular attention to the conflict between the military and the Treasury Department concerning freedpeople's wages and labor conditions; Eaton's friendship with, and deep admiration for, Grant; and the reception of Eaton's work by contemporaries and modern scholars. They rightly emphasize that Eaton's account demonstrates that a blend of "expediency, idealism, paternalism, and pragmatism" characterized the government's response to a humanitarian crisis created by secession and war (liv). They persuasively conclude that while Eaton's war expe-

rience made him an abolitionist, he was still very much a product of his time, espousing the common paternalistic and racist views of many upper-middle class White northerners working for progressive goals.

Each chapter of Eaton's work is thoughtfully annotated and often includes as many pages of endnotes as those of Eaton's original text. These notes are conveniently placed at the end of chapters rather than at the back of the book. Readers looking for additional context and for the opportunity to engage with a range of secondary and primary sources about policy squabbles within the Lincoln, Andrew Johnson, and Grant administrations and the rise of Mississippi and Tennessee's first public school systems, for example, will find their task easy and the source material rich. A deeper look into the cultural context in which Eaton and Ethel Osgood Mason (who first edited Eaton's work and penned the original biographical sketch) were writing would have been beneficial, but overall, the analysis is incisive and the annotations provide an invaluable trove for those keen to learn more or who seek avenues for further research.

This is an impressive volume. Indeed, the combination of Eaton's eloquent writing with Larson's and Smith's careful editorial work makes this not only a compelling read but one critical to our understanding of the process of emancipation in Mississippi.

Christopher T. Slocombe
Brownell Talbot School

A Union Tested: The Civil War Letters of Cimbaline and Henry Fike. Jeremy Neely. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2024. Acknowledgements, illustrations, notes, index. Pp. 252. $24.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780820369457.)

In A Union Tested: The Civil War Letters of Cimbaline and Henry Fike, editor Jeremy Neely, assistant professor of history at Missouri State University, argues that their correspondence illustrates the myriad challenges the Civil War imposed on marital and gender expectations. For this couple, Neely emphasizes the stress of distance. While Henry voluntarily left his family to serve his country, Cimbaline found herself in the unfamiliar position of running a household and being the sole caregiver for their young child. Henry, a graduate of McKendree College and a teacher by profession, served in the 117th Illinois Infantry, and had excellent penmanship, while his wife Cimbaline had no education and wrote phonetically. The couple's letters served as a lifeline, introspective and therapeutic. The emotional intimacy, a combination of banter, humor, and occasional unease, provides a glimpse into the lives of an average American couple amidst wartime uncertainty. Moreover, the written exchange compliments a "deepening scholarship on the Border West that explores the complexity of a fractious middle ground where North bled into South" (9).

In the opening chapter, the correspondence begins in August 1862 when Henry, who

enlisted out of a sense of duty, left his Mascoutah, Illinois, home for Camp Butler. His regiment elected him a lieutenant colonel, and he eventually became quartermaster. The following chapter, which spans from November 1862 to May 1863, documents the couple's mutual realization that the war will be lengthy. Writing from Fort Pickering in Memphis, James described rebels as evil, and he doubted the honor of secesh women. At this juncture, Henry first stated that the creation of the United States Colored Troops would be a gamechanger by demoralizing Confederates and increasing the number of Union troops.

Chapter 3, encompassing letters from May to October 1863, covers more happenings in Memphis and Mascoutah. In addition to health maladies, Cimbaline wrote of gossip, suspicion, and infighting not only in her community but in the Union League, she had helped to organize. Henry mused over the southern ladies sporting blue, interpreting the trend as a facade to appease occupiers. He had little sympathy for Black refugees and frequently used racial epithets. Even so, he frowned upon an officer having a young Black man beaten over theft accusations and wrote admiringly of a Black cook who rescued his family from slavery.

It is Chapter 4, covering January to May 1864, the Fikes briefly reunited and then parted once more. Shortly after Cimbaline and their daughter Ellie joined Henry in Memphis, his regiment was sent to Vicksburg, Mississippi, and then to the Red River Valley in Louisiana. While Cimbaline basked in the comradery of like-minded Union women, Henry experienced his first hardships as his diet, sleep, and overall health suffered as his regiment trekked across the South. His letters morphed into something of a travelogue, often describing the scenery. Though extremely patriotic, he expressed frustration with the Union withdrawal after the victory at Pleasant Hill.

In Chapter 5, which stretches from September to November 1864, the couple celebrated Lincoln's re-election but shared increasing impatience over the war's duration. Frustrated, Cimbaline criticized men who hired substitutes, did not serve, or complained about serving. In Harrisonville, Missouri, Henry witnessed the suffering of civilians whose farms and plantations had been pillaged by Confederate General Sterling Price's forces. In the next chapter, which spans from November 1864 to March 1865, Henry provided commentary on Nashville and New Orleans. The utter contempt he held for Confederates prevented him from sympathizing with the various plight of Southerners. In In Chapter 7, covering March through July 1865, Henry wrote from Fort Morgan and Montgomery, Alabama. While enraged over Lincoln's assassination, his racial epithets remained prevalent. This reinforces the idea that many Union soldiers fought to preserve the Union, not end slavery or establish any semblance of racial equality. Revealing a rare moment of compassion toward Southerners, he confessed

to pitying poor Whites because they had been "duped" by planters (205). Eventually, shortly after the war ended, he resigned his commission and, at long last, returned to his family. A brief epilogue provides details on the couple's post-war life. Their marriage had weathered the war and emerged all the stronger.

Neely's compilation exemplifies the duty border state residents exhibited while showing how the war instigated some maturation in racial thinking, at least when it came to Henry. While Henry spoke disparagingly of African Americans, he nevertheless exhibited a growing respect, especially regarding Black soldiers. Using letters, diaries, military documents, and census records, Neely's notes are meticulous, and readers will enjoy an immersion into the trials and tribulations of a Civil War-era couple trying not simply to survive, but to make sense of the world around them. Whether focused on men at war or women on the home front, this book has something for all readers. It will appeal to anyone interested in firsthand Civil War-era accounts.

Whitney Snow
Midwestern State University

NOTE TO PROSPECTIVE CONTRIBUTORS

Initial submissions should be made to editor Dennis J. Mitchell, dmitchell@meridian.msstate.edu or P.O. Box 571, Jackson, MS 39205-0571. Preferred manuscript length is 25–40 pages (double-spaced), exclusive of footnotes. The *Journal* encourages the inclusion of illustrations—photographs, drawings, maps, tables—that enhance the essay.

The Chicago Manual of Style (latest edition) should be followed, with some exceptions (primarily dates: the *Journal* prefers "December 1, 1866," to Chicago's "1 December 1866").

For more information contact *Journal of Mississippi History* editor Dennis J. Mitchell at dmitchell@meridian.msstate.edu or 601-479-6293.