

# The Wellspring

Vol. 4 No. 2  
March 2008

*Inclusion is the Wellspring of Democracy*

## Tallahatchie County Group Commemorates Emmett Till

*By Annette Hollowell*

On October 2, 2007, an unseasonably warm fall morning, more than 400 people gathered in front of the Sumner courthouse in Tallahatchie County, Mississippi, to witness the Emmett Till Memorial Commission's historic commemoration of Emmett Till.



*Members of the Emmett Till Memorial Commission, with master of ceremonies Senator David Jordan, at their commemorative event in Tallahatchie County.*

was killed for allegedly whistling at Bryant's wife, Carolyn. The notorious miscarriage of justice was one of the "sparks" that ignited the civil rights movement in the United States, and in 2006, it became a rallying point for the ETMC. The local commission, made up of both black and

Fifty-two years earlier, in 1955, that very courthouse witnessed an all-white, all-male jury acquit two white men—Roy Bryant and his half-brother, J.W. Milam—of the brutal murder of Emmett Till, a 14-year-old boy from Chicago who was visiting family in the area when he

*continued on Page 2*

### In this issue:

- 4 Regional Alliance Explores Restorative Justice
- 6 Legendary Warriors of Nonviolence Mentor UM Students
- 7 Respect Mississippi's Open Letter to the University of Mississippi
- 8 'Our Leaders Is We Ourselves'
- 10 "One Mississippi" Retreat
- 11 Welcome Table Active in All Four Congressional Districts
- 12 Kosciusko Club Highlights New Directions
- 13 Winter Institute Brings Provocative Films on Race to Local Festival
- 14 Winter Institute Creates New Resource for Civil Rights Curriculum  
"Secret Histories: Oxford"
- 15 BBC to Feature Mississippi Students in Radio History



Newsletter of the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation  
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## Emmett Till *continued from Front Cover*

white members, was troubled that their community had long refused to talk about the painful event and decided to face their past in order to go forward.

As the small town square geared up for the day's activities, members of the Commission milled around inside the courtroom, coming forward to sign their names on a statement of regret that was to be read and presented to Till family members. As Winter Institute staff, interns, and volunteers handed out programs and copies of the freshly printed Emmett Till Civil Rights Driving Tour brochure, they discovered that attendees hailed from as far as Chicago and South Carolina, from high schools in Mississippi and Alabama, and from neighboring communities.

Members of the Till family and the Commission sat in rows sheltered by the shade trees surrounding the courthouse steps. Other attendees sat in front of a small stage and lined the sidewalks. More than a hundred high school students attended, and a small kindergarten class sat quietly on the curb, their wide eyes taking in the whole event. Their presence prompted a question: How many of these young people had learned about the tragic lynching of young Emmett Till before the event?

State Senator David Jordan was master of ceremonies for a program that included local elected officials, Commission members, former Mississippi Governor William Winter, and Till family representatives.

One of the highlights of the event was when ETMC co-chairs Betty Pearson—a white woman who attended every day of the 1955 trial—and Robert Grayson—the first

African American mayor of Tutwiler who was the same age as Emmett Till at the time of his death—took turns reading the statement of regret signed by Commission members:

*... We the citizens of Tallahatchie County realize that the Emmett Till case was a terrible miscarriage of justice. We state candidly and with deep regret the failure to effectively pursue justice. We wish to say to the family of Emmett Till that we are profoundly sorry for what was done in this community to your loved one....*

Although the painful events occurred more than 50 years ago and no one was ever held accountable for the murder, representatives of the Till family graciously accepted the apology. The moments of redemption and forgiveness moved many in the audience to tears.

To mark the close of the ceremony, Jerome Little, president of the Tallahatchie County Board of Supervisors and member of the Commission, unveiled a newly-installed historic marker. The sign marks the first permanent memorial of Till's tragic death and is the first of a series of markers the community will place along significant Till-related



*Simeon Wright, cousin of Emmett Till, accepts the signed resolution from Emmett Till Memorial Commission co-chair Betty Pearson.*



*Winter Institute staff and interns, along with Gov. Winter and friends, stand in front of the new Emmett Till historical marker at the Sumner Courthouse. The group assisted with the Emmett Till Memorial Commission's commemorative event.*

sites. In addition, the Commission is securing funding to restore the Sumner courthouse to its 1955 dimensions, with the addition of a museum related to Till and the civil rights movement.

“I think having a biracial board that’s talking about something important to the community is a great step forward,” said Betty Pearson. “We need to preserve our history, and we need our children and grandchildren to know what really took place here. The children who live here should see this as part of where they come from.”

For the local community, this coming to terms with the past is their window to a brighter future. Already plans are developing to incorporate local civil rights his-



*Emmett Till Memorial Commission co-chair Robert Grayson, mayor of Tutwiler, reads the resolution, with co-chair Betty Pearson at his side.*

tory into classrooms in the area, and the Commission is working with the county to establish a youth center.

Supervisor Little believes the Till Commission’s process, “is bringing this community together and also making the world aware that some things have changed. We’ve still got a long way to go here in Tallahatchie County—and in the Mississippi Delta—but things have changed. And this is giving this community the chance to tell the right story.”

## Resolution of the Emmett Till Memorial Commission

We the citizens of Tallahatchie County believe that racial reconciliation begins with telling the truth. We call on the state of Mississippi, all of its citizens in every county, to begin an honest investigation into our history. While it will be painful, it is necessary to nurture reconciliation and to ensure justice for all. By recognizing the potential for division and violence in our own towns, we pledge to each other, black and white, to move forward together in healing the wounds of the past, and in ensuring equal justice for all of our citizens.

Over fifty two years ago, on August 28, 1955, 14-year old Emmett Till was kidnapped in the middle of the night from his uncle’s home near Money, Mississippi, by at least two men, one from LeFlore County and one from Tallahatchie County, Mississippi. Till, a black youth from Chicago visiting family in Mississippi, was kidnapped and murdered, and his body thrown into the Tallahatchie River. He had been accused of whistling at a white woman in Money. His badly beaten body was found days later in Tallahatchie County, Mississippi.

The Grand Jury meeting in Sumner, Mississippi, indicted Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam for the crime of murder. These two men were then tried on this charge and were acquitted by an all-white, all-male jury after a deliberation of just over an hour. Within four months of their acquittal the two men confessed to the murder.

Before the trial began Till’s mother had sought assistance from federal officials, under the terms of the so-called “Lindbergh Law,” which made kidnapping a federal crime, but received no aid. Only a renewed request in December 2002 from Till’s mother, supported by Mississippi District Attorney Joyce Chiles and the Emmett Till Justice Campaign, yielded a new investigation.

We the citizens of Tallahatchie County recognize that the Emmett Till case was a terrible miscarriage of justice. We state candidly and with deep regret the failure to effectively pursue justice.

We wish to say to the family of Emmett Till that we are profoundly sorry for what was done in this community to your loved one.

We the citizens of Tallahatchie County acknowledge the horrific nature of this crime. Its legacy has haunted our community. We need to understand the system that encouraged these events and others like them to occur so that we can ensure that it never happen again. Working together, we have the power now to fulfill the promise of “liberty and justice for all.”

# Regional Alliance Explores Restorative

By David Molina

In November of 2007, the Alliance for Truth and Racial Reconciliation (ATRR) convened at the University of Mississippi for its second major conference since the organization's formation in 2005. Born out of conversations between the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation, the Birmingham Pledge Foundation, and Southern Truth and Reconciliation (STAR), ATRR is the product of a realization that there are a growing number of organizations engaging in truth and reconciliation work in communities throughout the American South—groups committed to bridging the gap between forgotten/neglected history and the way in which cultural legacies of racial strife play out in local communities.

Keen to the critical role that appropriation and/or inversion of cultural signifiers played in the American civil rights movement, Dr. Susan Glisson, director of the Winter Institute, envisions ATRR as a “new kind of confederacy,” in which grassroots organizations from states that once formed the Confederate States of America would come together and devise a model for racial reconciliation that would lay the groundwork for a national effort.

Structurally, ATRR is at this point still a loose confederation of like-minded organizations, with little central structure beyond the de facto organizing role of the Winter Institute, and no human or financial resources outside those volunteered by member organizations. Nevertheless, the relative absence of structure does not hinder the ability of ATRR's work to be incredibly substantive, especially in regards to the coalition's primary role of facilitating much-needed crosstalk and collaboration between members. Still, by the end of the November conference it was clear that any framework for a large-scale truth and reconciliation campaign was in a nascent stage.

That a major program for restorative justice in the U.S.—one centered particularly on the legacy of racial violence and its associated miscarriages of justice—is still in a decidedly preliminary and preparatory moment is not an unreasonable consequence of ATRR's efforts. It was clear throughout the conference that much work is still to be done in fully engaging in the transition between truth recovery and restorative justice in the local communities for which ATRR members themselves advocate, let alone in imagining the broader context of a truth commission in the American South.

In an editorial printed in the Newnan, Georgia, *Times-Herald* in April of 2007, Thee Smith, professor of religion at Emory University and a member of STAR, writes of a memori-

al recognizing Sam Hose, the victim of an 1899 lynching (an event that nearly 2,000 white Atlantans traveled by “special trains” to witness): “Today while I am writing, I also judge that we are collectively about two years too early for an adequate memorial to the victim who died on this day in 1899. We have not yet, I acknowledge, laid the necessary groundwork to com-



*A panel of “engaged listeners” responds to issues and concerns raised at the ATRR conference.*

memorate Sam Hose on the one hand or his alleged victims among the Cranford family on the other.” Professor Smith continues in his editorial to unpack his claim that what was happening in Newnan in 2007 can be most appropriately viewed as a “pre-memorial”—part of a longer process of “[rescuing] all parties of that 1899 tragedy from the fate of being re-injured as co-victims of our national pastime: our pernicious ‘spectator sport’ that exploits public atrocities for our own conflicted political and ideological purposes.” This chorus of “all parties” resounds throughout the editorial, as it is perhaps the most difficult piece of ATRR's challenge to communities —“the challenge,” Professor Smith writes, “of including all parties to a conflict in its endeavors toward restorative justice: toward restoring (or sometimes first establishing) genuine civil relations and the rule of law among all the stakeholders in a community.”

It must not be overlooked, however, that the path to restorative justice begins with the essential act of truth-telling, especially in regards to the right of victims to tell their story, and to have that story acknowledged and validated. Without this, the insistence of “all parties” and “all stakeholders” is moot; and it is a testament to the groundwork in Newnan that Professor Smith can even have an honest conversation about the need not only to formally acknowledge the injustice inherent within the Sam Hose lynching, but also to “restore humanity to all the parties involved”—

# Justice in Second Conference

including the “hundreds of Atlanta spectators who attended the April 23rd lynching by train.” It is in this primary arena of truth and reconciliation that ATRR organizations particularly excel—the advocacy of communities who are committed to facing the difficult truths about their own histories, and willing to engage in the Faulknerian imperative that “the past isn’t dead. It isn’t even past.”

It is significant then that that most prominent element of the November 2007 ATRR conference itself was a series of sixteen thirty-minute presentations from member organizations about their ongoing work in communities. As a result, the stage for discussions later in the conference—those considering the possibility of a larger movement—was well set in the context of the truth that ATRR organizations have to tell about their own work, which is in turn built on the truths that the communities engaged in had been able to tell about themselves.

Some of these truths are well known: *On August 28, 1955, 14-year old Emmett Till was kidnapped in the middle of the night from his uncle’s home near Money, Mississippi...* Some are surprisingly absent from shared memory and common historical narrative, despite documentation, magnitude, and impact: *On January 7, 1923, the predominantly African American community of Rosewood, Florida was burned to the ground after nearly a week of mob violence...* Some are still in the margin between anecdote and history, persisting in only a few voices: *On January 31, 1964, Louis Allen was shot and killed in front of his home in Liberty, Mississippi...* But understanding the role that each story has had to play (or not play) in the construction of historical narrative—past and present, local and national—is crucial to imagining the process and perceived impact of the groundswell of truth-telling that would necessarily result from any major effort in racial reconciliation and restorative justice.

Of course, the place of “justice” in the phrase “restorative justice” and of “reconciliation” in the phrases “truth and reconciliation” and “racial reconciliation” should never be eclipsed. It is not only severely problematic that these difficult histories are forgotten/neglected, but also that in nearly all of them is a story of justice unserved: *in September 1955, after a deliberation of one hour, an all-white, all-male jury acquitted two men – Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam – of the crime of murdering Emmett Till (Bryant and Milam later confessed to the crime in an interview with Look magazine); in February 1923, a Grand Jury in Bronson, Florida, concluded that there was “insufficient evidence” to prosecute anyone involved in the Rosewood incident; since Louis Allen’s death could not be tied to federal voting issues, prosecution was left up to local law enforcement,*

*headed by a sheriff (and suspected Klan member) who a few years earlier had assaulted Allen.* It is in this space that the goals of truth-telling and reconciliation become intertwined and a framework for restorative justice possible: to acknowledge/remember an event, to establish that a miscarriage of justice occurred as part of the event, and to both examine the effects that this injustice had on all parties involved and place the event in the context of broader trends of cultural legacy and historical narrative.

As Professor Smith notes from the vantage point of the Sam Hose lynching, “such a restorative prospect would be ambitious for any society and at any time in human history to date.” Furthermore, a major difference between successful restorative justice efforts abroad—e.g. the South African Truth and Reconciliation Campaign, chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and active between 1995 and 2000—and those growing within ATRR and across the United States is the relative separation in time between event and campaign. The passage of time has made it increasingly crucial that organizations and communities in the U.S. committed to truth-telling be thoroughly supported in their efforts in even the primary stages of truth recovery, so that their commitment to engaging “all parties” involved will be protected. Having passed the House by a vote of 422-2—and currently awaiting a vote in the Senate—the “Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act of 2007,” which would authorize \$10 million annually from 2008 through 2017 for the Justice Department to hire special investigators to focus on solving civil rights crimes committed before 1970, promises to be galvanizing in this regard. However, essential as cold cases are to the truth and reconciliation process, they are nevertheless only starting points in a broader engagement. Left in isolation, action regarding these events results in feelings best summed up by the remarks at the ATRR conference made by Thomas Moore concerning the successful 2007 retrial of James Ford Seale in the 1964 kidnapping and death of Moore’s brother Charles and friend Henry Dee: “is it justice, I don’t know; but it is closure.”

That precise word—“closure”—serves as a point of contention in Rita Bender’s open letter to Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour in June of 2005. Following the verdict and sentencing of Edgar Ray Killen in the 1964 murders of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner (Ms. Bender’s husband at the time of his death), Mr. Barbour indicated his “belief that [the verdict] closed the books on the crimes of the civil rights years, and that we should now have ‘closure.’” Ms. Bender’s letter illustrates at length why the notion of closure

*continued on Page 6*

# Legendary Warriors of Nonviolence Mentor UM Students

by *Latoya Thompson*

In September, the Winter Institute interns took a road trip to the “home of country music.” That’s right, Nashville, Tennessee! After a long 4-hour ride, we met up with the Winter Institute staff at the home of an old friend, former intern Jeremy Hawkins.

Bright and early the next morning, we drove to Mt. Juliet, Tennessee, to the home of Rev. Will D. Campbell. Upon our arrival, we came upon a small, comfortable, log cabin, offset from the main house and accentuated with beautiful wind chimes, leaves of every fall shade, and a giant bell resembling the Liberty Bell. Rev. Will, a noted Civil Rights veteran and celebrated author, welcomed us. He told us of his years as an activist, lecturer, and preacher to country music stars, civil rights activists, and Klansmen. In 1954, he took a position as the director of religious life at the University of Mississippi, where he was a supporter of integration. His service at the university ended in 1956, when hostility towards his attitudes about racial equality, including death threats, pushed him out of the state.

Soon another hero of the Civil Rights Movement, Rev. James Lawson, and his wife, Dorothy, joined our circle. Rev. Lawson studied Mohandas Gandhi’s principles of Satyagraha in India and was crucial to establishing a nonviolence movement in the United States. He also served as the southern director of FOR (Fellowship of Reconciliation) and conducted nonviolence training workshops for the SCLC (Southern

Christian Leadership Conference). To this day, Rev. Lawson promotes and trains activists in nonviolence tactics.

The Lawson and Rev. Will shared many stories, including how Mrs. Lawson had worked in Rev. Will’s office, and he introduced the two. As Rev. Will and Rev. Lawson walked off arm in arm, I knew that there was a profound respect between the two.



*Winter Institute staff and students met with Rev. James Lawson (center) and Rev. Will Campbell (right) about the tradition of nonviolent action.*

This was a great experience for all of us there—one that I personally will cherish for the rest of my life. It’s not every day that we meet distinguished civil rights activists, but thanks to the Winter Institute, I know that it won’t be the last. To Rev. Will and Rev. Lawson, I’d like to say that your stories were a breath of fresh air for me. Thank you for your aspirations and all your hard work to help make the South better for me and for generations to come.

## Regional Alliance *continued from Page 5*

in the sense of “closing the books” on the civil rights era is questionable, and how Mr. Barbour himself has “a unique opportunity to acknowledge the past and to participate in insuring a meaningful future for [Mississippi]”—especially in ways that do not view the retrial of a single man as providing restorative justice to the entirety of events that occurred in Mississippi during the civil rights era. (The Emmett Till Bill hopefully will give the Governor’s office more opportunity to reflect publicly on these matters.) Nevertheless, this difference in voice, context, and meaning of a single word illustrates the supreme challenge that ATRR faces in its prolonged effort to imagine large-scale truth and reconciliation across the many barriers that separate “all parties” from fully engaging in the legacy of racial conflict in the

United States: closure for some is certainly not justice for all.

Concluding its 2007 conference with plans to reconvene in Atlanta in the spring of 2008 or 2009, members of the Alliance for Truth and Racial Reconciliation returned to the diverse groundwork that allows a discussion of the difference between justice and closure to even be meaningful. Reconvening after a year or two of further engagement in communities hopefully will unveil more insight into the broader strokes and deeper structures that would make a truth commission in the United States possible. It will undoubtedly be another empowering forum for a community of truth-telling—some truths familiar, some still shocking, some newly revisited, but all with legacies that, in their impact, demand consideration.

# Respect Mississippi's Open Letter to the University of Mississippi

by Jake McGraw

I write on behalf of those within the student body who are highly concerned about the level of social segregation on our campus and disadvantages we encounter because of it. While we did not create the institutions that promote this polarization, we have—through complicity or complacency—lent them the support to keep our student population divided to this day. But behind the hateful and unrepresentative actions of a few, a large base of disappointment and dissatisfaction has provided the student body with the impetus to work toward a more inclusive university community.

Ole Miss takes pride in its hospitable atmosphere, and few, if any, major universities can match its sense of community. However, that close-knit feel presents itself within two distinct circles: one white, one black – with little to no interaction in between. Upon entering the university, many of us are forced to accept social segregation simply because we have no alternative.

Respect Mississippi's objective, plainly stated, is to create sustainable channels of social interaction and interdependence among the white, black, and other smaller communities on campus. We do not propose to tear down the existing social institutions or structure; rather, we will merely open opportunities for exchange. Several student organizations have already begun to coordinate a plan of action. Respect Mississippi, in addition to hosting weekly dialogue meetings open to any and all viewpoints, is spearheading the organization of a campus-wide forum to address the issue. Along with the on-campus resources of the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation, we have the tools necessary to build a truly inclusive Ole Miss community.

However, to move forward effectively, we must receive the full support of the faculty and administration. Students don't often like to admit it, but authority figures play a significant role in influencing our attitudes and actions; therefore, we ask that you work with us to advise, facilitate, and endorse the steps it will take to achieve our vision of an interwoven university community. Most importantly, though, we request your commitment to support a student-led campaign to fulfill this vision. A top-down decree,

regardless of its intentions, could be interpreted as adversarial toward certain groups and would be detrimental to our efforts. When building an inclusive campus, no one can feel isolated or alienated.

We understand there has been frustration with the perceived lack of acknowledgement or concern from students regarding the DKE incident and other social problems facing our university. [In Fall 2007 the Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity was suspended for a series of violations around an accusation of a racially charged assault.] No, we have not engaged in any 60s-style demonstrations, but a lack of overt passion should not be mistaken for passiveness. Our acknowledgement is present and our concern is palpable.

We also understand the sentiments of those who have become conditioned to cringe whenever "Ole Miss" and "race" are used in conjunction, no matter the context, and are wary

*We, the students, are committed to coming together, and we ask for the full support of the faculty, staff, and administration in facilitating our strategy to bridge the social gaps that are all too present on our campus.*

of supporting a movement that once again sheds light on the turbulent history of our university. Because of that history, our actions—especially pertaining to race—are subject to intense national scrutiny. But because of that scrutiny, our university—more than any other in the country—has a platform from which to champion successful racial and social integration. Positive exposure will come for the university as a result of our progress and should not serve as an end in itself.

The problem of social segregation is certainly not unique to Ole Miss; however, we have no excuse to let it continue at our university any longer. We, the students, are committed to coming together, and we ask for the full support of the faculty, staff, and administration in facilitating our strategy to bridge the social gaps that are all too present on our campus. Only a mutual effort will allow us to achieve the vision of an Ole Miss community in which we can all take part.

# ‘Our Leaders Is We Ourselves’

By Susan M. Glisson

From Jena, Louisiana, to the hallways of Columbia University in recent months, Americans are discussing the role of young people in addressing issues of race. Most pundits lament the lack of revolutionary fervor in the rhetoric and actions of today’s youth. Conversely, young people have responded by pointing out that in fact they are creating their own ways of engaging, especially through new technologies.

The deeper truth is that effective social change occurs by focusing on local issues, using grassroots, communal, nonviolent strategies. We are quick to laud leaders like Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy for their contributions, which were significant. But what we have been taught about those contributions is a myth perpetuated by the most egregious shortcoming in teaching history: the savior narrative.

We have all been told that a charismatic leader transformed the South and brought everyone to freedom. This savior myth’s danger lies in two suggestions implicit in its message: one, that social change occurs only from a hierarchical, charismatic leader, and two, that in the absence of such a leader, we cannot accomplish organizing and social change on our own.

The reality of social change during the civil rights period is at once more complicated and more accessible than any savior myth. Organizing begins with relationships and capacity building, which teaches the necessary tools for investigation, nonviolent conflict resolution and inclusive community engagement. These first steps are followed by careful analysis of the problem (or problems), and negotia-

tion with stakeholders who can make a difference. Massive protests are actually a final step when all previous work has failed, not a first-strike response. In the absence of such work on the ground, massive protests fail, as witnessed by the U.S. entrance into Iraq despite the gatherings of millions of people across six continents.

For commentators who are dismissive of current forms of youth activism, it must be made clear that it is unfair to castigate “Generation Q,” as journalist Thomas Friedman recently named the current youth population, for not being more vocal, radical, or active for humanitarian causes. We cannot blame our youth for inaction when we have failed as a nation to equip them with an accurate representation of their own history, one that provides the tools and ideas to accomplish the organizing and change-motivating tasks critical to our survival. As important as it is to learn of Dr. King, it is equally necessary to learn of Hartman Turnbow, who along with fellow black landowners in Holmes County, Mississippi, was able to challenge the local power structure in the 1960s, or to know of Hollis Watkins, a young student in Pike County who joined the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and helped organize Freedom Summer and who continues to be an advocate for equality and excellence in education. In short, to understand the organizing tradition accurately is to understand the often slow nature of tradition and the simultaneous need for preparation and a lifetime commitment.

Some young people are learning these lessons. On the



In September, the Winter Institute helped to sponsor the OMazing Race, a two-day event organized by the university’s Alumni Affairs. Eighty students

and twenty faculty and staff participated in the gathering, which was designed to bring diverse students together to explore a range of experiences and perspectives. Day one included team-building exercises and story circles about participants’ experiences around identity and race, and day two included a scavenger hunt featuring University of Mississippi historical sites.





campus of the University of Mississippi, the interracial student group Respect Mississippi engages in inquiry and dialogue and then implements actions based on analysis. A key current issue of Respect Mississippi is the difficult but provocative topic of segregation in the Greek system. After learning of the organizing tradition of the civil rights movement, Greek students have begun difficult conversations with their fellow members, prodding slow but quiet integration of previously all white or all black groups, and they have joined forces to raise awareness on such issues as Darfur and the Jena Six case. All of these measures have grown from dialogue, analysis, and negotiation, and have been organized completely by students, without a central leader or adult supervision.

In Jackson, Mississippi, the Civil Rights and Civil Liberties Club at Jim Hill High School also uses dialogue and analysis to explore topics around which to organize and mobilize. And they've been joined in their efforts by students from surrounding public and private schools, all of whom ache to interact with the larger world in some meaningful way. The group recently helped pass a bond bill to improve schools and is currently challenging the Jackson Public School System's attempts to reinstate corporal punishment. They began by analyzing the history of corporal punishment and investigating alternatives in student accountability and discipline and then presenting those results to the school board, after organizing their fellow students to join them.

In the spring of 1955, fifteen-year old Claudette Colvin was arrested for violating the segregation ordinance of

Montgomery, Alabama. When asked at her arraignment who put her up to it, she responded, "Our leaders is we ourselves." A local group of activists debated using her case to challenge Jim Crow on buses there but determined to wait for a more appropriate case. In December that year, a secretary of the local NAACP who had been attending leadership and organizing training sessions at Highlander Folk School was arrested, and the Montgomery group launched their challenge to the segregation code. We call her now the "mother of the civil rights movement," and most students are taught that Rosa Parks was just too tired to get up from her seat that day. The opposite characterization is a more accessible and useful model for change. Social change does not just happen accidentally or because a charismatic leader embraces his destiny. It happens because citizens learn how to organize and challenge the circumstances that constrict their own lives. Until we stop viewing change and activism through hierarchical lenses, the actual machinery that motivates change—put into motion by people whose names remain absent from many history lessons—will remain invisible, and "Generation Q" will continue to be cheated of opportunities to see and learn.

The inheritance of activism that resides rightly in the hands of today's young people is not in a statue or on Facebook. It is in the breadth and depth of local, communal organizing occurring every day. When we point our children to that tradition, we ensure that the halls of power will not long rest easy in their dominion.



# UM Students Hold “One Mississippi” Retreat to Address Social Segregation

by Bryan Doyle

*“I hope the impact of this weekend will not follow us back to Ole Miss but that it will lead us back to Ole Miss.”*

Nearly eighty student leaders at The University of Mississippi convened for the first time to address the prevalence of social segregation within the University’s student institutions during a three-day retreat Feb. 15 to 17. The group, representing every segment of the student body, spent the weekend at the Lake Tiak-O’Khata resort outside Louisville, Mississippi, discussing the campus’s social polarization and organizing strategies to promote more opportunities for cross-cultural interaction.

Since the University’s tumultuous integration in 1962, Ole Miss has made tremendous progress in racial reconciliation but has never completely removed the scars of its past. With black students now 14 percent of enrollment, the campus is more diverse than at any point in its 160-year history. However, recent events have overshadowed the University’s progress, most notably an altercation in August 2007 between a black freshman and members of a historically-white fraternity. The administration under Chancellor Robert Khayat responded by suspending the fraternity from campus for one year.

Despite the administration’s categorical condemnation, an effective and lasting response to the issues of racial tension and social segregation must be crafted within the student body. Respect Mississippi, a student organization dedicated to cross-cultural dialogue, service, and policy at the University, held a series of meetings last fall in which students openly raised the issue of social segregation on campus and how it affects each and every student on a daily basis. After weeks of student discussion and talks with Susan Glisson, executive director of the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation; Ollie Rencher, a local Episcopal minister; and Dean of Students Sparky Reardon, Respect Mississippi leaders formed the One Mississippi Coordinating Committee to

organize a student effort to bridge the social divides on campus. The outcome of the One Mississippi Retreat will serve as the foundation for this effort.

Three major objectives guided the retreat’s discussions: 1) Identifying the specific areas in which social segregation presents itself to students; 2) discussing and analyzing potential solutions to problems caused by social segregation; and 3) creating a tangible product (statement, policy recommendation, etc.) that addresses the issue and that can be presented to the student body, faculty, administration, and community. In completing these objectives, we hope to forge new and stronger relationships among student leaders that will help foster future interaction.

The retreat was university-funded but completely student-driven. Dr. Anita P. George, a professional dialogue facilitator from Starkville, Mississippi, advised the coordinating committee on activities to most effectively accomplish the weekend’s objectives. Students were invited to attend based upon leadership qualities, campus involvement, and motivation, and the final group spanned many distinctions of race,



JENNIFER MICHAEL/STHE DAILY MISSISSIPPIAN

*One Mississippi retreat planners Jake McGraw, Melissa Cole, Bryan Doyle, Nickolaus Lockett, and Patrick Weems*



*One Mississippi Retreat participants*

religion, nationality, sexual orientation, and organizational affiliation.

Students led the weekend's activities, which included a "cultural mapping" exercise that demonstrated the fluidity of identity and cultural categories, story circles focusing on first impressions of the social power of race, and sessions developing concrete action plans for increasing social integration on the UM campus.

Those plans concentrate on five areas of concern:

- 1) residence life and what students viewed as housing segregation
- 2) freshman programming, including Orientation
- 3) integrated social events and community service projects
- 4) developing a multicultural mindset and creating an appealing central space on campus to nurture it
- 5) education about contested traditions, such as the historic baggage around UM symbols, including Colonel Reb, the song "Dixie," the Grove, and even the term "Ole Miss"



*Cultural mapping activity*

Justin Crosby, a student chosen by his peers to deliver an inspirational address, summed up many students' concerns about debates over the university's traditional symbols, when he said, "When driving on the road to change, how long can you look in the rearview mirror before you crash?"

Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, including a freshman's comment on the transformative power of the retreat, "I have been inspired. I came a cynic, but I leave believing."

Others stressed the importance that what began at the retreat continue on campus to make a real impact. A senior participant said, "This wasn't a social experiment or a 'Kum ba yah' camp. This was something much more substantive than that." One young woman said, "I believe that this retreat was a great starting point. It not only opened my eyes to the racial issues at Ole Miss, but it also allowed solutions to arise from the problems. I think with the dedication of the people involved here back in Oxford, things really can begin to change."

# Welcome Table Active in All Four Congressional Districts

*By April Grayson*

Since the June 2007 kickoff of The Welcome Table: A Year of Dialogue on Race, the Winter Institute has expanded its outreach into communities within each of Mississippi's Congressional Districts, including West Point, Greenwood, and Biloxi.

"West Point is one of the newest members of the Welcome Table and we are more than proud to be involved with such a wonderful project," said Robin Perry of West Point. "We feel that togetherness and inclusiveness is the only way to build the community. We must become the change we want to see in our homes, communities, state, and nation."

"The topic of race among different ethnicities in this community has been much like the elephant in the room. Everyone knows there is a problem, but no one wants to acknowledge it," Perry said.

Winter Institute Executive Director Susan Glisson began meeting with a community group there in fall 2007. The group is interested in starting a dialogue between the public and private schools there, and they would like to address residential segregation and racial equity in city services. The West Point group agrees that the commonality of their purpose coalesces in their hopes for their children.

Similarly, in Greenwood, Glisson has been meeting with a group of diverse community members, which has committed to regular meetings and to identifying issues around which to organize community efforts. Major areas of concern include better schools, economic parity, and interracial trust and communication.

In Biloxi, efforts are organizing around an event that happened there in 1959, when Dr. Gilbert Mason, Sr., led a grassroots protest to desegregate area beaches in Biloxi. Previously, black citizens were allowed to use only the beach at Waveland. The wade-ins, as they became known, sparked years of contention as blacks sought to desegregate public spaces and local schools and local whites resisted those efforts. The Winter Institute is supporting a new interracial group in Biloxi, which is planning a March 2009 commemoration and will engage in community dialogue leading up to that event.

# Kosciusko Club Highlights New Directions

By Preston Hughes

The Club, a biracial men's civic club founded in 1995 in Kosciusko, Mississippi, closed out its twelfth year in October 2007. The guest speaker at its Twelfth Anniversary meeting, to which guests were invited, was Dr. Susan Glisson, Executive Director of the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation.

The Club was founded by ten charter members, five white and five black, who felt the need to create an organization to improve communication and cooperative involvement in community projects by black and white men. The group believed that getting together in an informal setting on a regular basis, with an informative program and an opportunity to discuss issues, would facilitate this communication and cooperative involvement as it helped members get to know each other better.

New members join The Club two-by-two, one white and one black. Currently, there are thirty-four members, evenly split between black and white. There are no officers and no dues.

The Club meets one night a month for fellowship, a meal and an informative program, which usually includes a speaker and an extensive question-and-answer period following the speaker's presentation. Meetings last about an hour and a half. The setting is very informal, with no head table and no podium, and the speaker usually remains seated but is visible to all, since all are seated around an open square.

Once a year, in the anniversary month of our founding, the group invites wives and other guests for a program and special guest speaker. Among the guest speakers for these programs have been former Governors William Winter and Ray Mabus, former Mississippi Supreme Court Justice Reuben Anderson, Dr. Andy Mullins, Dr. Dolphus Weary, former State Attorney General Mike Moore, KHS graduate Rufus Gladney, former Mississippi Secretary of State Dick Molpus, Mr. Ronnie Agnew, Executive Editor of The Clarion-Ledger, and Congressman Bennie Thompson.

The Club discussions do not focus on race and race-related issues. As men interested in improving our community, we have programs on subjects such as education, economic development, and local government. For example, the local school superintendent comes to discuss education-related matters. The football coach comes to discuss the football team. The Police Chief or Sheriff comes to discuss law enforcement issues. Leaders in industry and business, as well as local economic development officials, discuss the economic health of the community. Recent meetings have also included programs on global warming and legal issues, including "truth in sentencing"-related issues.

Although race reconciliation is not the stated focus of our group, the process of building trust and friendships across racial lines occurs naturally as we meet, share a meal, and discuss issues of concern to us all. Of course, now and then race-related topics do come up. For example, the issue of racial imbalance among teachers in the Kosciusko School District was discussed. The question of

*Although race reconciliation is not the stated focus of our group, the process of building trust and friendships across racial lines occurs naturally as we meet, share a meal, and discuss issues of concern to us all.*

why Kosciusko schools have relatively few black teachers, compared to whites, was responded to by the black high school principal as well as a black member of the school board (both members of The Club). The answers, provided by such credible sources, helped clear up an area of misunderstanding and even skepticism that had existed among some black citizens regarding this issue.

In a community in which there is little substantive communication between black and white adult males, a program like The Club can provide a way to facilitate such communication, making possible the establishment of new ties of friendship and new opportunities for cooperation for the good of the community. The National Council on Racial Reconciliation, established by President Clinton in the mid-1990s, has cited the Club as a "Promising Practice."

# Winter Institute Brings Provocative Films on Race to Local Festival

by April Grayson

**O**n February 7-10, 2008, the Oxford-Lafayette-University community hosted the 5th annual Oxford Film Festival. This year the Winter Institute was proud to sponsor five films at the festival. Some of these films will play in other Mississippi festivals and venues, so we encourage you to see them when you have an opportunity.

## Another Word for Family

by Winter Institute Documentary Educator April Grayson



In this experimental documentary, the filmmaker returns to her small hometown in the Mississippi Delta to explore the burden of its troubled history and its impact on her own life. Through both new Super 8 footage and family archives, the film confronts how a community and its individuals deal with the legacy of racism.

## Banished

by Marco Williams

From the 1860s to the 1920s, dozens of towns and counties across America violently expelled their entire African-American communities. One-hundred years later, many of these towns remain all white. In the long and contentious history of race relations in the United States, this is one example that has previously gone relatively unacknowledged. *Banished* tells the story of three of these counties (Pierce City, Missouri; Harrison, Arkansas; and Forsyth County, Georgia)—of the black descendants returning to learn their shocking history, and the white residents struggling with their hidden past.

## The Devil Came on Horseback

by Annie Sundberg & Ricki Stern

Using the exclusive photographs and first hand testimony of former United States Marine Captain Brian Steidle, *The Devil Came on Horseback* takes the viewer on an emotionally charged journey into the heart of Darfur, Sudan, when an Arab government is systematically executing a plan to rid the province of its black African citizens.

## Greensboro: Closer to the Truth

by Adam Zucker

During the Greensboro Massacre of 1979, the Ku Klux Klan murdered five members of the Communist Workers Party. Despite extensive television footage of the attack, no one was ever convicted. The film portrays a number of the participants—five of the survivors and two Klansmen—who have been scarred by murdered spouses, physical injuries, public and judicial persecution, and shifting political realities over the past quarter century. From the years 2004 to 2006, the characters converge as Greensboro mounts a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to re-investigate the event, the first time such a form of justice was utilized in the United States.

## Moving Midway

by Godfrey Cheshire

Award-winning Southern film critic Godfrey Cheshire uses the relocation of his family's North Carolina plantation as the occasion to examine the Southern plantation in American history and culture, including its impact on areas as diverse as music, movies, and contemporary race relations. Part present-tense family drama, part cultural essay, the film also involves an ongoing dialogue between Cheshire and Dr. Robert Hinton, an African-American history professor whose grandfather was born a slave at Midway Plantation.

# Winter Institute Creates New Resource for Civil Rights Curriculum

by Shad White

During the 2006 session of the Mississippi Legislature, the Winter Institute and others spearheaded an effort to pass Senate Bill 2718. SB 2718 authorized the teaching of civil rights history in every public school classroom in the state and created the Civil Rights Education Commission. Among other things, the Commission was charged with providing “assistance and advice to K-12 schools with respect to the civil rights movement, human rights education, and awareness programs.”

To this end, the Winter Institute started what has become informally known as the “Civil Rights County Project.” Once finished, the “County Project” will be an online database of the unique civil rights history of every county in Mississippi. K-12 teachers and students, along with the general public, will have access to this database to learn more about the historic events in their own towns and communities. Moreover, this database will collect information from locals who have anecdotal knowledge of the Movement in their area and convey that knowledge to others. In this way, the County Project will be wiki-based (taken from the free, online, user-written encyclopedia “Wikipedia”). Information on the Movement from locals who would like to contribute to the Project will be submitted through users like teachers. These stories then will be compiled by the Winter Institute and added to what will hopefully be an ever-growing account of some of the most important events of the twentieth century.

In order for the County Project to be immediately usable upon its activation, months of research by Winter Institute employees needed to be done for every county in the state. The last few months in the life of the County Project have been particularly exciting because the gathering of raw facts for

every county has been completed. With the help of law school classes and undergraduate courses focusing on civil rights, the Institute has finished the first and most lengthy stage of the County Project’s development after months of work.

Over the next few weeks this raw data will be edited and saved onto the County Project’s prototypical website. The research conducted in each county must be sorted by several categories, including “significant events,” “people,” “organizations,” and “places.” These entries, along with the photos that accompany them, will be proofed and steadily added to the site by Institute employees. Simultaneously, the user interface through which the world will access the County Project’s articles will be refined. The Institute has set a preliminary goal of finishing these phases by mid-March and hopes to have the County Project online and operational by the end of this academic semester.

The County Project’s overarching goal is to make civil rights knowledge accessible and applicable to new generations of students. Though these students did not experience the Movement, they must have knowledge of its historical and social repercussions. Mississippi was the site of some of the most important changes in human rights history. These changes should be celebrated, no matter how big or small. The heroes of the Movement, many of whom have gone unremembered, must be celebrated as well, for many of them still live in the counties they helped improve. Their untold stories must be collected and given an audience. At the Winter Institute, we believe the County Project is another piece of the puzzle needed to nurture the students of Mississippi to be more socially conscious, tolerant citizens of the world they share.

**“Secret Histories: Oxford”** is a new documentary theatre production that explores the effects of history, culture, and ethnicity through oral histories of five people from different backgrounds who all call Oxford, Mississippi, their home. Written and directed by local Oxford resident Leyla Modirzadeh, in collaboration with Ping Chong and Company, and co-sponsored by the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation, the production will play on April 17, 18, and 19 at 8 p.m. and April 20 at 2 p.m. at The Powerhouse Community Arts Center, 413 South 14th Street, Oxford, MS.

Funds raised from the play will go toward supporting the Yoknapatawpha Arts Council at The Powerhouse. Tickets to the show are available by calling 662-236-6988.

# BBC to Feature Mississippi Students in Radio Story

Internationally-renowned news organization consults Winter Institute to survey African-American students on state higher education

**Nickolaus Luckett** is a freshman at the University of Mississippi and an intern at the Winter Institute. A student in the Honors College, he is majoring in Political Science, Public Policy, and Classics. **Brionna Knighten** is a freshman at Jackson State University and a graduate of the Rome Community Development Organization's youth program, sponsored by the Winter Institute. The Winter Institute recommended these two students to participate in a BBC radio documentary about the experiences of African American students at HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) in comparison with HWCUs (Historically White Colleges and Universities). The radio piece is scheduled to air on February 29.

*By Nickolaus Luckett*

This year I was one of four students selected to be a part of an audio documentary for the BBC. Right now, I consider my experience with this project a good one, but after hearing the documentary for the first time, that might change.

The BBC is the world's largest newsgathering system, by means of its regional offices, foreign correspondents, and agreements with other news services. It reaches more than 200 countries and is available to more than 274 million households. The BBC is known for its influential and informative documentaries, and I am now part of one. I am part of the audio documentary known as "The Race Apart Diaries." This documentary's purpose is twofold: to give insight into the lives of African Americans at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and then compare their experiences with an African American student at a Historically White College or University (HWCUs).

I was chosen to give insight into my life, an African American freshman entering an HWCU. I had to do three basic things: first, keep a journal to record my thoughts and feelings as I prepared to enter Ole Miss—at least until I received the recording equipment. Then, upon receiving the audio equipment, I recorded my thoughts, feelings, and reac-

tions to Ole Miss throughout my first semester. Finally, in December, I had an interview with BBC producers so they could ask me specific questions and I could elaborate on thoughts I had expressed in my recordings.

I knew Brionna Knighten, chosen by the BBC to represent the perspective of a HBCU student, from my childhood in Drew. During our senior year, we both attended the "Your Time" Conference at Ole Miss, where we met Susan Glisson through a mutual friend. Each of us discussed working at the Winter Institute if we came to Ole Miss, but Brionna ultimately decided to go to Jackson State.

The BBC documentary helped me to transition into life at Ole Miss; it gave me an outlet to express my feelings and reactions. However, I am afraid of what I said. I gave a lot of information about myself and my reactions to Ole Miss—the good and the bad. Recorded material can be manipulated, and I fear some of the things I said could be taken out of context. I do not want it to reflect negatively on the university nor do I want it to reflect negatively on HBCUs. All of these fears might be irrational and it could come out great, but until I hear it my fears still remain. Overall, though, this was a great opportunity and I know that good things will come from my participation in it.

*By Brionna Knighten*

It's such a contrast," is what my friend Anna and I heard several times while touring the campus with our honorable guests from England. They were referring to the street that separates our campus from the neighborhood.

"On one side street there seems to be poverty, but on the other, the university is beautiful," the conversation continued. All we could say is, "Yes, that tends to happen to a university stuck in the middle of the city."

Our visitors from England were very warm and intelligent. I have never met anyone from that area, so it was totally new for me. I loved their accents! My friend and I still try

to mimic their accents. When they first started interviewing me, I was a little nervous; however, after a couple of minutes, I seemed to be casually talking to friends.

This experience was so awesome. Never in a million years would I have thought that I, from little Rome, would have the opportunity to participate in such an activity. It seems that I gained more from this experience than I even imagined. By disclosing my personal feelings, ideas, and experiences, it dawned on me who I really was and my real purpose for life. As I recorded my view of the world for the production, "my" world was uncovered.

# Winter Institute Examines Poverty in First Annual Session

by April Grayson

On March 31 and April 1, the Winter Institute will host the first of what it plans to make an annual meeting on the University of Mississippi campus in Oxford.

The meeting will highlight the 40th anniversary of the 1968 Poor People's campaign, which targeted poverty and promoted economic justice. The campaign, which was led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), began with a march in Marks, Mississippi. Soon after the beginning of the campaign, Dr. King was assassinated in Memphis.

General meetings, open to the public and featuring a keynote speaker and panelists, will be on Monday, March 31, from 2 to 4:30 p.m. and from 6:30 to 9 p.m. A board meeting, open to the public, will be on Tuesday, April 1, at 9 am. For more information, contact the Winter Institute by phone at 662-915-6734 or by email at [wwirr@olemiss.edu](mailto:wwirr@olemiss.edu).

## Winter Institute Intern Alumni News

Jeannetta Craigwell-Graham was a summer intern at the Winter Institute in 2004. She is now a second year law student at Boston University School of Law. This summer she will work at Sherman and Sterling in New York, focusing on corporate law. She is the External Vice-President for Black Law Student Association and a Second-Year Representative for Student Government. After graduation she plans to move to New York City.



After finishing her 2004 summer internship at the Winter Institute, Ashleigh Lawrence graduated from Wake Forest University with a degree in Politics and International Studies in 2005. She moved to New York to study at Columbia University, where she completed a Master's in Human Rights Studies with an emphasis on Transitional Justice in 2007. Since October 2006, she has been working as a Program/Policy Associate in the HIV/AIDS Section of UNICEF.

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