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Guest Editor's Introduction

James G. Thomas Jr.
University of Mississippi

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Campaigning at the Neshoba County Fair during the 1971 lieutenant governor's contest. Image courtesy of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (William F. Winter and Family Papers, Z/2285).

Guest Editor's Introduction

JAMES G. THOMAS, JR.

The politics and social climate of Mississippi have experienced radical change in the past century, and for the past seven decades William Winter has been involved in creating and encouraging that change. Since entering the Mississippi House of Representatives in 1947, he has served the state of Mississippi in the roles of state tax collector, state treasurer, lieutenant governor, and governor. This special issue is dedicated to exploring Winter's life and legacy. His most well-known and celebrated political accomplishment is inarguably his 1982 Education Reform Act, which he passed two years into his term as governor and which realized an entire wish list of reforms, most notably the creation of state-supported kindergartens. His Education Reform Act is considered the most significant piece of education legislation since the public school system began in Mississippi in 1870. As Andrew P. Mullins, Jr. claims in his introduction to Governor Winter's *The Measure of Our Days: Writings of William F. Winter*, the act was the "crowning achievement of his administration." He goes on to say that "with the passage of this legislation to restructure K–12 education, Mississippi became the leader of the education reform movement that swept the nation in the late 1980s and early 1990s." Much ink has been spent elsewhere discussing this particular moment in Mississippi history, and while that topic is covered peripherally in most of the essays in this issue, it was decided early on that the lion's share of the material in this volume would primarily explore the diversity of Governor Winter's accomplishments and contributions to the state of Mississippi.

But William Winter's contributions to his home state—he was born and raised in Grenada—reach far beyond the Mississippi State Capitol. As citizen,

William Winter has served his state as a historian, as a member and president of various boards, as a college and seminary trustee, as a promoter of the arts, and as a fierce champion for racial reconciliation. It is difficult to refrain from recounting Governor Winter's biography here, but that has been done, and done well, in a number of publications, including in the fine introduction by Andrew P. Mullins, Jr. in *The Measure of Our Days: Writings of William F. Winter* and in *William F. Winter and the New Mississippi: A Biography*, by Charles C. Bolton. In addition, in 2014 the Southern Documentary Project at the University of Mississippi produced *The Toughest Job: William Winter's Mississippi*, a feature-length documentary film that focuses on the governor's fight to pass the Education Reform Act. His biography was also briefly recounted in a comic book produced by his unsuccessful campaign for governor in 1967. That comic, re-published in its entirety, is included in this issue, and each essay here recounts at least some aspect of his life's story.

This issue considers the life, accomplishments, and legacy of Governor Winter from a number of angles. Contributors include several historians, a professor of journalism, a college administrator and conference director, an archivist, a public policy coordinator, and an editor. Many of these essays are interconnected and can be read in conversation with one another, each adding information about topics sometimes only briefly mentioned in other essays where the primary focus lies elsewhere. Governor Winter's legacy is a complex web of sometimes seemingly conflicting politics, and as you'll discover, this issue does work to contextualize his political philosophy, political discourse, and governance.

Opening this issue with a contemporary interview with Governor Winter seems appropriate. In Jake McGraw's "'We Really Are in This Together': A Conversation with William Winter," the governor reflects on his political past, laments the state's continued public and political "erosion of support for public schools," and expounds upon his hopes for Mississippi's future. The interview opens with a conversation on the governor's thoughts on public education in Mississippi today—the successes of which are due in large part to Governor Winter's legislative battle to pass the 1982 Education Reform Act. Despite that landmark success, the governor admits that public education progress remains hampered by legislative underfunding: "We still have not made the financial commitments that we have to make, and until we do that we're never going to catch up." A frank discussion of Governor Winter's early support of segregation follows: "Nobody knows any better than I that in politics you subvert a lot of your idealism to what you'd like to justify as larger goals," he says. Winter's support of a "go slow" desegregation strategy is a topic that is repeated in this issue, and in this interview the governor frames those massive-resistance-era decisions as being pragmatic. He unflinchingly

admits to “pandering to a certain extent,” and he calls his compromise of principles “the worst times I had in politics.” “I knew segregation was not going to last,” he says. “I knew that, and I wanted to accommodate integration in a way that did not create too much social dislocation. As I say, I was a gradualist.” The irony is that, by and large, and at the risk of his own political career, he consistently made decisions that labeled him a moderate—decisions that today would ironically be considered radically racially intolerant. Even a moderate segregationist in 1960s Mississippi had an uphill battle to fight. Today, Winter’s legacy is defined by his work on racial and educational equality, although he admits that “a huge amount of work [still] needs to be done.” In this interview, McGraw gives the reader an opportunity to discover just how optimistic Winter is on that count.

The essay by historian Maarten Zwiers examines segregationist strategies and Democratic Party politics in Mississippi during the 1950s, when William Winter labeled himself an “Eastland-Stennis Democrat.” James Eastland and John Stennis embodied different styles and strategies to defend the white Southern way of life, yet Winter united both senators in his political persona. In this historical essay, Zwiers explains this paradox. Instead of emphasizing the differences between the Eastland camp of massive resistance to racial integration and the Stennis camp of practical segregation, he investigates the collaboration between these two blocs, especially in their attempts to keep Mississippi in the Democratic Party after the Dixiecrat Revolt until the Kennedy-Johnson campaign of 1960. Ultimately, the essay shows the early signs of Winter’s common-sense progressive politics in a state where staunch support of segregation was a necessity in order to have a voice in state politics.

The short comic book “You’ll Be the Winner When You Vote for Winter!” was produced by the William Winter primary campaign for governor in 1967. It is an interesting political artifact. Obviously more telling than a simple campaign button or poster or ad, it gives a political and personal autobiography of the candidate—an appeal for votes ostensibly told in the Everyman candidate’s own words. The document is certainly a product of the time, with interesting illustration juxtapositions between what is assumed to be the Vicksburg National Military Park in one panel and the protesting “beatniks and goons” in another. A plea to the segregationist voting bloc shows up here, but the lion’s share of the platform deals with education reform and bread-and-butter issues, such as good roads, good jobs, the benefits of tourism, and government efficiency.

Kathleen W. Wickham provides the most in-depth discussion of what is Governor Winter’s most defining accomplishment as a legislator, the 1982 Education Reform Act, which reshaped public education in Mississippi for all the

state's children. Beyond covering the details of the legislation and the arduous fight Governor Winter took on, Wickham shows how the governor turned to the state's leading newspapers for editorial support. He found that support in several papers, but it was the news coverage of the Jackson *Clarion-Ledger*, a paper historically "known for racist politics, promoting segregation, and supporting the efforts of the State Sovereignty Commission," that made the most impact. Led by the new editor, Charles Overby, the paper's coverage of the legislative debate earned it a Pulitzer Prize and helped Winter garner enough support to pass the bill at a time in Mississippi's history when public education was seen as the domain of black and poor white students—the result of post-*Brown* white flight from the public school system.

Because this issue of *The Southern Quarterly* is dedicated to understanding the life and political career of Governor William Winter, the inclusion of an essay on his wife, First Lady Elise Winter, is essential. Mrs. Winter not only changed the role of the First Lady of Mississippi, she was instrumental in influencing and guiding public policy—a role seldom before undertaken by a Mississippi governor's wife. Traditionally, the role of First Lady was to tend to the social calendar of the Mansion and to manage the upkeep and care of the grounds, but Mrs. Winter was also intensely interested in the needs of the state. Like Governor Winter, Mrs. Winter was committed to improving the state's public school system, and her participation in that effort is well known. Prison reform, however, particularly improving the poor living conditions at the Mississippi State Penitentiary, otherwise known as Parchman Farm, was of dire concern to her as well, and she was instrumental in developing successful projects for this institution. JoAnne Prichard Morris's essay highlights both Governor Winter's effort to improve conditions at Parchman and Mrs. Winter's hands-on leadership in that campaign. As Morris writes, "Her contributions toward shaping and achieving the progressive goals of the Winter administration—especially in education and prison reform—made a distinctive mark on the role of First Lady and set new standards for what executive spouses can accomplish."

Charles Bolton's essay, "William F. Winter: The Politician as Historian," documents Winter's intellectual and political progression, a result of his understanding that Southern progress—racial, economic, and social—must break free of the "confines of Lost Cause explanations" of white Southern identity. In this essay, Bolton claims that Winter "came to appreciate how the Southern past limited the possibilities for the Southern future and how education reform and racial reconciliation represented the best path to a truly New South." His childhood and college career, particularly his studies under University of Mississippi history professor Jim Silver, helped shape his understanding of Southern history, and thus his ideas of how to best

move forward as a racially reconciled state. His passion for history led to his support for the preservation of the Old Capitol, to his longtime work with the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, to his own writings as a historian, and to give a number of stirring speeches that “utilized historical arguments to stake out his political positions, ones increasingly at odds with many of his counterparts in the Deep South.”

Amanda Lyons’s essay provides a detailed history of Governor Winter’s active involvement with the Mississippi Department of Archives and History since he became a member of the Board of Trustees in 1957 (1957–2008). In addition to working toward a better future for all Mississippians, Winter has been a tireless advocate for the state’s historical preservation, which he has often accomplished in coordination with the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH). Indeed, according to Lyons, “Perhaps no individual has had a greater impact on MDAH than Winter,” which she shows in a number of ways. As a member of the Mississippi House of Representatives, Winter helped strengthen the relationship between the Mississippi State Historical Commission, the Mississippi Historical Society, and MDAH. In the 1950s, Winter, with other members of the legislature and support from Governor J. P. Coleman, successfully campaigned to save and restore the Old Capitol building in Jackson, dedicated in 1961 as the State Historical Museum in the Old Capitol Restoration. Years later, Lyons reports, Winter wrote that he considered that project to be “the most satisfying and rewarding” of his preservation work. Winter’s friendship with Myrlie Evers led to the acquisition of the Medgar and Myrlie Evers Papers, one of the “most significant civil rights collections in the country.” More recently, his leadership in the 2 Mississippi Museums Project, which will include the Museum of Mississippi History and the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum, both scheduled to open in 2017, has made “one of the most significant public construction projects in Mississippi history” a reality.

Further illustrating Governor Winter’s commitment to Mississippi is his longstanding relationship with the Natchez Literary and Cinema Celebration (NLCC), a humanities-based conference sponsored by Copiah-Lincoln Community College. As NLCC founder Carolyn Vance Smith recalls in her essay, the governor has been instrumental to the celebration’s success since its founding. Smith recalls her nervous invitation to the governor to be the event’s director of proceedings. Ever gracious, the governor immediately accepted, saying, “I would be honored to do so.” Smith recounts the subsequent NLCC responsibilities the governor took on—from raising funds, serving on its advisory board, and helping attract prestigious speakers to participate (such as Eudora Welty, Willie Morris, Lerone Bennet Jr., Elizabeth Spencer, Richard Ford, and John Grisham) to helping create a lasting partnership be-

tween the Mississippi Department of Archives and History and the NLCC. The conference even found a way to put Winter's credentials as historian on display when, in 2004, he gave the keynote address "The Evolution of Politics in the Deep South," which was included in a *Southern Quarterly* issue dedicated to the NLCC (Spring 2014).

Otis W. Pickett's essay, "'We Were All Prisoners of the System': William Winter, Susan Glisson, and the Founding of the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation," begins with a narrative of Winter's childhood and youth—the genesis of his progressive stance on race. Pickett goes on to position Winter's participation with President Bill Clinton's One America in the Twenty-First Century: The President's Initiative on Race as the push Susan Glisson used to create the University of Mississippi's William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation (WWIRR), whose mission it is to "support a movement of racial equity and wholeness as a pathway to ending and transcending all division and discrimination based on difference." Today, as Pickett points out, "there is no other state with more organizations, institutions, conferences, programs, professionals, churches, educational opportunities, and community organizing events around issues of racial reconciliation than Mississippi. Likewise, there is no other state that has been working as actively for as long as Mississippi to formally process race and reconciliation." These successes are largely due to the efforts of Governor William Winter and his work to help found what has become the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation. Pickett's essay is a history of the WWIRR's work, especially as it relates to local and national conversations, from the University of Mississippi campus to communities, and now to youth and policy work. "As the governor and, many would argue, chief citizen and statesman from the State of Mississippi," Pickett claims, "Winter has become the civil archetype for what looks like to reconcile to one's fellow man of an opposite race. Winter's leadership on this issue—including his guidance in the creation of an important institute for racial reconciliation at the University of Mississippi—is perhaps his greatest legacy."

We end the issue with reviews on two recent publications. The first is a review essay on *William Winter and the New Mississippi: A Biography*, by contributor Charles C. Bolton. Wilson's review gives us a shorthand guide to the only in-depth biography written on the iconic Mississippi governor. Second is Erica Van Schaik's review of *Once in a Lifetime: Reflections of a First Lady*, a memoir by First Lady Elise Varner Winter edited by contributor JoAnne Prichard Morris. Wilson's and Van Schaik's reviews give insight into both of these fine books, each leading us to texts that provide deeper understanding of two Mississippians who continue to contribute leadership and guidance to their home state.

I would be remiss if I did not mention that Governor William Winter has also been one of *The Southern Quarterly's* most distinguished editorial board members. The journal has profited from his patronage of the arts and his scholarship about the South. I am eternally grateful to *The Southern Quarterly* for the opportunity to edit this issue on one of Mississippi's greatest and most widely respected elected officials.

University of Mississippi

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Chief Justice Robert Gillespie of the Mississippi Supreme Court swears William Winter in as state tax collector, 1956. Image courtesy of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (William F. Winter and Family Papers, Z/2285).