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# "Mississippi Ain't What It Used to Be": The Tougaloo Nine and the Read-in at the Jackson Municipal Library

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On March 27, 1961, nine students from Tougaloo College, a historically Black college located a few miles north of Jackson, Mississippi, walked into the main library. At the time, the Jackson Municipal Library—like most public libraries in Mississippi and the rest of the South—barred Black patrons. The "Tougaloo Nine," however, refused to accept the library's color barrier. As the students sat down at tables and began to read, the library staff quickly called the police. The police arrived a few minutes later and ordered the students to leave. When the students failed to move, they were arrested and taken to jail. Two days later, the Tougaloo Nine were convicted of disturbing the peace. While their trial happened inside a Jackson courthouse, outside the city police, wielding clubs and dogs, attacked a group of African Americans who had peacefully gathered to support the students. In the days and weeks following the Tougaloo Nine's "read-in" further protests erupted in Jackson and across the state. The Black Freedom Movement had come to Mississippi.

There are numerous studies of the Black Freedom Movement in Mississippi, including several which focus on the struggle for equal rights in Jackson.[1] But none of the works offers a thorough analysis

[1] On the Mississippi freedom struggle see, John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995); Kenneth T. Andrews, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: The Mississippi Civil Rights Movement and Its Legacy* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2004); Michael Vinson Williams, *Medgar Evers: Mississippi Martyr* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2011); James P. Marshall, *Student Activism and Civil Rights in Mississippi: Protest Politics and the Struggle for Racial Justice* (Baton Rouge, LA: LSU Press, 2013); Ted Ownby, ed., *The Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2013); and Jo Ann Williamson, *Radicalizing the Ebony Tower: Black Colleges and the Black Freedom Struggle in Mississippi* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2008). For studies that focus on the Jackson movement, see John R. Salter, Jr., *Jackson, Mississippi: An American Chronicle of Struggle and Schism* (Hicksville, NY: Exposition

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of the origins, dynamics, consequences, and meaning of the Jackson read-in, the first direct action protest in Mississippi's capital and one of the first in the state in the 1960s. A close examination of the Jackson read-in can illuminate three important, though underappreciated, features of the Black Freedom Movement in Mississippi and across the South. First, it shines a light on Tougaloo College as a focal point of civil rights activism in Mississippi. Although there is a large body of literature that examines Black student activism of the 1960s, few studies have concentrated on the Black college campus as an organizing site of civil rights protest. "Students are credited with dominating the movement after 1960," writes Joy Ann Williamson in her study of Mississippi's Black colleges and the Black freedom struggle, "but the existing literature ignores the immediate environment in which student activists functioned: the college campus."[2] Tougaloo, and other Black colleges, were critical to the fight for racial justice. Founded by White abolitionists after the Civil War to educate newly freed Blacks, Tougaloo College had always served as a safe space in which Black youth could develop ideas, strategies, and institutions to challenge White supremacy. In addition to their academic lessons, Tougaloo students—and students from other Black colleges—learned a "second curriculum . . . a pedagogy of hope grounded in idealism, race consciousness, and cultural nationalism" that sustained and inspired a vision of Black liberation.[3] For decades, however, Mississippi's "closed society" made it far too risky for Tougaloo students to directly confront the state's racial order. That began to change in the 1950s when Tougaloo students, faculty, and staff started to challenge the racial status quo beyond the campus. With the Jackson read-in, campus activism reached a whole new level. In the 1960s, Tougaloo students, faculty, and staff trans-

Press, 1979); M. J. O'Brien, *We Shall Not Be Moved: The Jackson Woolworth's Sit-In and The Movement It Inspired* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2013); and Carter Dalton Lyon, *Sanctuaries of Segregation: The Story of the Jackson Church Visit Campaign* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2017).

[2] Williamson, *Radicalizing the Ebony Tower,* 3. There are some book-length studies that focus on civil rights activism at Black colleges and universities, but the subject remains understudied. See, for example, Jelani Favors, *Shelter in a Time of Storm: How Black Colleges Fostered Generations of Leadership and Activism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2019); Ibram Rogers, *The Black Campus Movement: Black Students and the Radical Reconceptualization of Higher Education* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); F. Erick Brooks, *Tigers in the Tempest: Savannah State University and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Macon, GA: Macon University Press, 2014); and Williamson, *Radicalizing the Ivory Tower.*

[3] Favors, *Shelter in a Time of Storm*, 5.

formed the campus into a "movement center" and used the institution to organize and support protests against segregation in Jackson and around the state.

An analysis of the Jackson read-in also demonstrates the importance of NAACP youth chapters in the struggle for racial justice. The NAACP is best known for leading the legal assault against Jim Crow schools and other segregated institutions. But the association also organized state conferences and local chapters that engaged in various kinds of civil rights work. As early as the 1930s, the NAACP recruited college students and other young people into its ranks. From the beginning, NAACP youth pushed more conservative, adult leaders to support direct action against segregation. "In many ways," writes Thomas L. Bynum in his history of NAACP youth, "the youth chapters propelled the NAACP to diversify its civil rights strategy beyond court action to a wide range of direct-action tactics in its fight for racial equality." [4] In the 1960s, NAACP college chapters and youth councils were a driving force of the sit-in movement throughout the South. In Mississippi, hundreds of Black youths found their way into the state's civil rights movement through NAACP youth chapters. Founded in 1960, Tougaloo's NAACP college chapter planned the Jackson read-in, with nine students from the chapter participating in it. The success of the read-in helped to convince the NAACP's national office to pursue a more aggressive civil rights program in Mississippi in the 1960s, with NAACP youth chapters playing a crucial role in it.

By challenging library segregation in Mississippi, the Tougaloo Nine called attention to the stark racial inequities of library service in the South. Their read-in helps us to see libraries as part of the struggle against segregated public accommodations. At one time, the fight to gain access to public accommodations was seen as the *sine qua non* of the modern civil rights movement. In recent years, however, historians have downplayed the importance of the drive to desegregate public accommodations and privileged the fight against job and housing discrimination, which are seen as more fundamental and enduring.[5]

[4] Thomas L. Bynum, *NAACP Youth and the Fight for Black Freedom, 1936-1965* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2013), xiii-xiv.

[5] My understanding of the trajectory of civil rights historiography is informed by Charles W. Eagles, "Toward New Histories of the Civil Rights Era," *The Journal of Southern History* 66 (November 2000): 815-848; Peniel E. Joseph, "Waiting till the Midnight Hour: Reconceptualizing the Heroic Period of the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965," Souls 2, no. 2 (2000): 6-17; Charles M. Payne, "'The Whole United States

Yet there is no question that African Americans deeply resented their exclusion from public spaces and were willing to risk their lives to gain access to them. Historians have documented, among other things, the stories of African Americans who struggled to desegregate schools, amusement parks, swimming pools, hospitals, airports, buses, and trains. However, historians have largely overlooked the fight to desegregate libraries.[6] During the Black Freedom Movement, hundreds of civil rights activists engaged in dozens of protests against Jim Crow libraries across the South.[7] In some ways, the struggle to desegregate libraries mirrored the struggle to desegregate other public accommodations. Southern Whites doggedly resisted, sometimes with violence, extending greater library access to Blacks and only grudgingly did so

is Southern!': Brown v. Board and the Mystification of Race," *The Journal of American History* 91 (June 2004): 83-91; Jacqueline Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History* 91 (March 2005): 1233-1263; Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang, "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies," *The Journal of American History*.

[5] (March 2007): 265-288; Steven F. Lawson, "Long Origins of the Short Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1968," in Danielle L. McGuire and John Dittmer, eds., *Freedom Rights: New Perspectives on the Civil Rights Movement* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 9-37; and Victoria W. Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Rollercoasters: The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 2-12.

[6] On the desegregation of specific public accommodations, see, for example, Jeff Wiltse, *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Vanessa Burrows and Barbara Berney, "Creating Equal Health Opportunity: How the Medical Civil Rights Movement and the Johnson Administration Desegregated U.S. Hospitals," *Journal of American History* 105 (March 2019): 885-911; Anke Ortlepp, *Jim Crow Terminals: The Desegregation of American Airports* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2017); Catherine A. Barnes, *Journey from Jim Crow: The Desegregation of Southern Transit* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1983); and *Wolcott, Race, Riots, and Rollercoasters*. Although historians have largely ignored libraries as a site of civil rights activity, scholars working in the fields of library studies, education, and information science have produced numerous studies that examine library desegregation in the South. See, for example, Wayne A. Wiegand and Shirley A. Wiegand, *The Desegregation of Public Libraries in the Jim Crow South* (Baton Rouge, LA: LSU Press, 2018); Cheryl Knott, *Not Free, Not for All: Public Libraries in the Age of Jim Crow* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015); Patterson Toby Graham, *A Right to Read: Segregation and Civil Rights in Alabama's Public Libraries, 1900-1965* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2002); Dallas Hanbury, *The Development of Southern Public Libraries and the African American Quest for Library Access, 1898-1963* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020); David M. Battles, *The History of Public Library Access for African Americans in the South, or, Leaving Behind the Plow* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, (2009); and Michael Fultz, "Black Libraries in the South in the Era of De Jure Segregation," Libraries and the Cultural Record 41 (Summer 2006): 337-359.

[7] In their selected list of library protestors and protests, Wiegand and Wiegand name almost 200 protestors who took part in more than a dozen library protests across the South. Wiegand and Wiegand, *Desegregation of Public Libraries*, 211-218.

because of civil rights protests, court rulings, and federal laws. However, White Southerners were generally more willing to allow Black and White children to use the same library than to sit together in the same classroom or swim in the same pool. Some civil rights activists, including the Tougaloo Nine, understood this and strategically chose libraries as the location from which to make their initial stand against segregation. As a result, libraries, including the Jackson Municipal Library, were sometimes the places where racial mixing first took place in the Southern cities, and the walls of segregation first began to crumble.

The first public libraries in the South were established in the 1890s. From the beginning, southern libraries were segregated, with libraries for Whites vastly outnumbering those for Blacks. Segregated libraries, which were seen as a way to encourage literacy and education among both races while reinforcing notions of White supremacy, were part of a broader effort among southern progressives to promote both social uplift and social control. "Library boards considered it worthwhile to provide library service for blacks," writes Patterson Toby Graham in his study of library segregation in Alabama, "so long as that service was inexpensive and did not suggest in anyway social equality among the races."[8] Most southern communities, however, did not extend public library service to African Americans. Few had the money to build libraries for Whites, let alone libraries for Blacks. To fund library construction, many southern communities partnered with the Carnegie Foundation. This partnership helped establish a color line in southern libraries. Between 1890 and 1919, Carnegie library grants helped to pay for more than 1,600 new public libraries across the nation, including a number in southern cities.[9] Although the Carnegie Foundation required local communities to contribute to library construction costs and maintenance, it did not require them to open their libraries to all races. As a result, southern Whites took Carnegie's money and built libraries that only they could use. A 1926 American Library Association study found that only 55 of 720 libraries in fourteen southern states served African Americans.[10]

That there was any public library service at all for African Americans in the South was a testament to the efforts of Black leaders who raised money for libraries for African Americans and pressed Whites

[8] Graham, *Right to Read*, 8.
[9] Knott, *Not Free, Not for All*, 40.
[10] Ibid., 42.

for access to segregated libraries. In several instances, African Americans managed to secure Carnegie funding for Black libraries after being denied access to Whites-only ones. The first Carnegie-funded library for Blacks – Western Colored Branch Library in Louisville, Kentucky – opened in 1908, a few months after a Whites-only main library had opened. Public libraries for Black people, however, were typically small branch libraries with fewer books and other resources than the main libraries reserved for White people. In the 1930s, New Deal programs and the Rosenwald Fund, a philanthropic organization started by Sears and Roebuck executive Julius Rosenwald, helped to expand library service, especially in rural areas, to southern Blacks. Nevertheless, most African Americans continued to be denied access to libraries. In the late 1930s, almost two million southern Blacks lived in areas with public libraries that denied them service.[11]

Mississippi's libraries were the most restrictive in the South. To begin with, the state had few public libraries. In 1900, there were only three public libraries in the entire state.[12] Over the next three decades, local communities built several libraries, but the state government did not start funding public libraries until after World War II, so the number remained small. A 1950 study of library service in Mississippi, *People Without Books*, paints a dismal picture of the state's public libraries. "There are 63 libraries in the state [for a population over two million]," it reported. "All but a few of these are small collections of books, poorly housed, and weakly supported."[13] The lack of libraries meant that "only 36 percent of the people of Mississippi have any form of local library service."[14] As bad as library service was for Whites in Mississippi, it was much worse for the state's Black residents. African Americans were barred from most of the few public libraries in the state. In 1950, there were only eight communities in Mississippi that maintained any public library service for Blacks. These libraries served only about one-eighth of the state's one million Blacks. "What

[11] Ibid., 60, 156, 134; Wiegand and Wiegand, *Desegregation of Public Libraries*, 35-39. African Americans also established private libraries and bookmobiles. Wiegand and Wiegand, *Desegregation of Public Libraries*, 20-21.

[12] Margarete Peebles and J. B. Howell, eds., *A History of Mississippi Libraries (Montgomery, AL: Paragon Press, 1975)*, 47.

[13] *People Without Books: An Analysis of Library Service in Mississippi*, Bureau of Public Information, Univ. of Miss., 1950, 12, Folder 4, Box 2, Papers of Lura Gibbons Currier (The University of Southern Mississippi, McCain Library and Archives, Hattiesburg, Mississippi), hereinafter cited as Currier Papers.

[14] *People Without Books*, 12, Currier Papers.

little public library service there is in Mississippi is limited largely to serving the White population," observed *People Without Books*. "There is at present no library to which the other seven-eighths of the colored people may go or write for information or reading material."[15]

Mississippi's Blacks had to fight to secure any measure of library service within the strict confines of segregation. The first library for African Americans in the state opened in Meridian in 1912. The Carnegie Foundation provided the city with $30,000 for a Whites-only main library and $8,000 for a branch library for its "colored citizens." It was the only time Carnegie money helped to build a library for Black people in Mississippi.[16] Two years later, Carnegie funds helped pay for a new Whites-only library in Clarksdale. At some point, Clarksdale's Black residents, who outnumbered White residents three to one, gained access to a small room in the basement of the library. In 1930, a bond issue was passed for a new main library in Clarksdale. That same year a new branch library for Blacks was also opened in the city, probably because of the city's large African American community demanding better library services.[17] In 1924, the (White) Woman's Club in Starkville in Oktibbeha County started a segregated library there. It was not until 1949 that Blacks in Oktibbeha County finally gained access to library service when a branch was established at a Blacks-only high school.[18] In 1934, a WPA grant helped establish a Whites-only library in Noxubee County. At some point a branch library for Blacks in the town of Macon in Noxubee County was opened, but it closed in 1943.[19] Between 1958 and 1961, branch libraries for Blacks were established in Sardis, Batesville, and Oxford, but there remained few libraries for Black people in the state, and the existing ones lacked space, books, and trained personnel.[20]

In 1961, Jackson was one of the few communities in Mississippi to offer public library service for African Americans, but the service was segregated and inferior. Jackson's first public library, a Carnegie library, opened in 1914 and was segregated from the start. The city's Black residents, who made up forty percent of the population, had to

[15] Ibid., 13, Currier Papers.
[16] Peebles and Howell, eds., *A History of Mississippi Libraries*, 67-68.
[17] Ibid., 74-75.
[18] Ibid., 90-91.
[19] Ibid., 114-115.
[20] Ibid., 108.

wait thirty-seven years for public library service.[21] In the meantime, Jackson's African American population launched private library initiatives. In 1929, the Mary Church Terrell Literary Club, a Black literary society, started collecting books and making them available at a local YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association). Black residents also started their own small private library. In 1938, they petitioned the city commission to take over the library, which held 784 books, but the petition failed.[22] In 1950, the Jackson chapter of the Junior League, a (White) women's organization committed to civic improvement, established the George Washington Carver Library, a library for African Americans. In 1951, the city took control of the library, marking the beginning of publicly supported library service for Blacks in Jackson. The following year another branch library for Blacks was established in the College Park Auditorium, but the library occupied only two rooms in the building.[23]

In 1954, Jackson built a new main library, the Jackson Municipal Library, to replace the aging Carnegie building. It was a big deal for the city. More than three hundred people from all over the South attended the dedication ceremony for the new $480,000 library, which was touted as "a masterpiece of utility and beauty."[24] The day before the ceremony the city proudly announced the event with a quarter-page advertisement in the *Jackson Clarion Ledger*. The advertisement proclaimed, "Welcome to your new municipal library. . . . You, the citizens, made it possible. It is a distinct credit to our rapidly progressing city. Use it."[25] But not every city resident was welcome to attend the dedication ceremony or to use the library. Both were segregated and off limits to African Americans. Two years later, in the wake of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, Jackson officials built a new building, at a cost of $130,000, to house the George Washington Carver Library. The main library, however, remained closed to African Americans.[26]

It is not surprising that the first African Americans who tried to

[21] Ibid., 69-71.

[22] Margaret Gunn Holt, "History of the Jackson Library, Jackson, Mississippi" (Master's thesis, Texas Women's University, 1965), 6-7.

[23] Ibid., 21; Pennie Williams Dickie, "A History of Public Library Service for Negroes in Jackson, Mississippi, 1950-1957 (Master's thesis, Clark Atlanta University, 1960), 12-14; Wiegand and Wiegand, *Desegregation of Public Libraries*, 21-22.

[24] "Jackson Dedicates Beautiful Library," *Jackson Clarion Ledger*, December 8, 1954, 1.

[25] Ibid., December 7, 1954, Special Library Section.

[26] Holt, "History of the Jackson Library," 28-29.

use the Jackson Municipal Library were students from Tougaloo College. The campus had always been a conspicuous presence on the Mississippi racial landscape. Founded in the aftermath of the Civil War by the American Missionary Association (AMA) on a 500-acre cotton plantation just north of Jackson, Tougaloo reflected the abolitionist orientation of its founders, who viewed education as a vehicle to promote Black social advancement. The college made it a priority to promote dialogue and interaction between races. From its inception, the college's faculty, administration, and its board of trustees were racially mixed, and it had an open attendance policy. It hired racially progressive White teachers, regularly invited speakers to campus who promoted integrationist ideas, and sought to develop contacts between its Black student body and White students and faculty at other nearby colleges. As early as the 1930s, students from Tougaloo and Millsaps College, an all-White school in Jackson affiliated with the United Methodist Church, visited one another's campuses.[27]

Despite its commitment to integration on campus, Tougaloo managed for decades to steer clear of trouble with Mississippi's White power structure. Unique among historically Black colleges in Mississippi, Tougaloo enjoyed a large degree of financial and political independence. Most of Tougaloo's funding came from northern organizations, including the AMA, the United Negro College Fund, the United Church of Christ, and the Disciples of Christ. It received no state support. In addition, most of the school's board of trustees, administrators, and faculty were not from Mississippi. As a result, state officials could not easily retaliate economically against the college or its employees. While no one affiliated with Tougaloo was immune from police harassment and other forms of intimidation, there was, according to Joy Ann Williamson, a tacit agreement between Tougaloo and the surrounding White community that shielded the campus, "Tougaloo, like other HBCUs, maintained an uneasy agreement with the surrounding White community: Tougaloo constituents did not aggressively agitate against the racial status quo in exchange for being left alone by hostile Whites."[28]

[27] Clarice T. Campbell and Oscar Allan Rogers, Jr., *Mississippi: The View from Tougaloo* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1979), 3-20, 170-171.

[28] Joy Ann Williamson, "'This Has Been Quite a Year for Heads Falling': Institutional Autonomy in the Civil Rights Era," *History of Education Quarterly* 44 (Winter 2004): 557. On Tougaloo's founding and early years, see also Favors, Shelter in a Time of Storm, 49-69.

In the 1940s and 1950s, however, the growth of the Black Freedom Movement sparked increased activism among Tougaloo students, faculty, and staff. In 1946, Tougaloo chaplain William Bender challenged the color line in Mississippi when he tried to vote in the first statewide election since the Supreme Court outlawed the all-White primary in *Smith v. Allwright*. As Bender approached the polling place, he was confronted by a deputy sheriff, who, with his pistol drawn, defied him to enter. After he returned to Tougaloo, hostile Whites burned a cross on the Tougaloo campus.[29] A year later Ernst Borinski, a German Jew who escaped Nazi persecution, took a teaching position at the college. The sociology professor later recalled that from the first day of class he exhorted his students to question the racial order in Mississippi. "I am not from here. I am not from America," he told them. "But when I see the kinds of laws you have here I assure you it [segregation] cannot last very long. We will challenge all the laws. I don't want you to accept any of them."[30] His students, who had not been taught to question segregation, did not know what he meant. So he showed them. He took his students to a segregated drug store and ordered ice cream for the whole group. After initially refusing to serve the Black students, the drug store, fearing a scene, reluctantly brought them ice cream. To subvert the racial order, Borinski often played up his German nationality and his accent and feigned ignorance of segregation. "I played this game very carefully," he revealed, "by often pretending I just don't know, just don't know."[31]

Borinski's main contribution to civil rights activism on campus was his sponsorship of integrated Social Science Forums. He developed the forums to foster dialogue between Blacks and Whites and raise awareness about the injustices of segregation. "I was not a rabble rouser, period," Borinski recalled. "But I had always built bridges between people and made them aware that certain things that are there should not really be."[32] About twice a month Borinski invited a speaker to Tougaloo to give a talk on an important social, political, or economic topic. In addition to Tougaloo students, faculty, and staff, Borinski invited White moderates from the Jackson area to attend the forums.

[29] Dittmer, *Local People*, 2-3.

[30] Ernst Borinski Interview with John Jones, January 13, 1980, Tougaloo, Mississippi (Mississippi Department of History and Archives, Jackson, Mississippi), 22.

[31] Ibid., 24.

[32] Ibid., 23.

The talks were preceded by dinner and followed by open discussion and refreshments. "Tougaloo's Social Sciences Forums . . .," observes sociologist Maria Lowe, "helped to mobilize not only students, but faculty members as well as additional movement sympathizers and activists. The Forums accomplished these tasks by operating as a prefigurative space where Blacks and Whites could regularly meet, interact as equals, discuss political issues, and strategize about ways they could challenge Mississippi's system of racial segregation."[33]

In 1960, a group of Tougaloo students, including some who had attended Borinski's forums, established an NAACP college chapter and took the fight for racial equality beyond the campus. The students drew inspiration from the student sit-in movement, which began on February 1, 1960, when four Black college students from Greensboro, North Carolina, staged a sit-in at a segregated Woolworth's lunch counter. All told, thousands of students took part in demonstrations in more than one hundred and four communities in 1960.[34] NAACP youth chapters were a driving force of the sit-in movement. Many students joined the sit-in movement through them. From 1959 to 1960, membership in NAACP youth chapters soared from 27,430 to 46,789 as they "launched rigorous campaigns across the South to dismantle the racial barriers that barred them from first-class citizenship."[35] In March 1960, Tougaloo students met with Medgar Evers, the NAACP field secretary in Mississippi, to discuss establishing an NAACP chapter on campus. For five years, Evers had struggled to recruit new members, build local NAACP chapters, and organize direct action against segregation in the state amidst growing White resistance and violence. Evers recognized that the sit-in movement was a game changer for Mississippi because it had generated interest in civil rights at Tougaloo and other local colleges. In a letter to Gloster Current, NAACP national director of branches, Evers wrote, "The unrest of young people throughout the

[33] Maria Lowe, "Sowing the Seeds of Discontent: Tougaloo College's Social Science Forums as a Prefigurative Movement Free Space, 1952-1964," *Journal of Black Studies* 39 (July 2009): 868. For more on Borinski's role as a civil rights leader, see Maria Lowe, "An Unseen Hand: The Role of Sociology Professor Ernst Borinski in Mississippi's Struggle for Racial Integration in the 1950s and 1960s," *Leadership* 4 (February 2008): 27-47.

[34] Martin Oppenheimer, *The Sit-In Movement of 1960* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, 1989), 177. On the Greensboro sit-ins, see William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1980).

[35] Bynum, *NAACP Youth,* 106, 117.

southland and nation has had its influence on the young people of Tougaloo College and Campbell College [an African Methodist Episcopal junior college] here in the Jackson area."[36] The meeting between Evers and Tougaloo students resulted in the formation of the college's first youth chapter. John Mangram, Tougaloo chaplain and a member of the board of directors of the Jackson NAACP, advised the students.[37]

The Tougaloo NAACP chapter went to work right away. In April 1960, it helped organize a boycott of White merchants in Jackson during the busy Easter shopping season. To get the message out to the city's Black residents to join the protest against retail segregation, more than 350 college students from Tougaloo College, Campbell College, and Jackson State College (a state-supported Black college) distributed thousands of flyers throughout the African American areas of the city and visited African American churches.[38] With the motto "Let's celebrate Easter in old clothes!!" the flyers urged the city's 61,000 Blacks to join the "sacrifice for human dignity and boycott white-owned businesses in downtown Jackson."[39] The following month, the Tougaloo NAACP chapter held a rally on campus to celebrate the sixth anniversary of the *Brown* decision. Reverend Mangram and NAACP state president C. R. Darden both spoke during the celebration.[40] In November, Tougaloo students participated in a youth program as part of the fifteenth annual Mississippi State Conference of Branches in Jackson.[41]

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[36]Medgar Evers to Gloster Current, March 9, 1960, Box III: C 244, Part III: Branch File, 1956-1965, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Records, 1842-1999 (Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.), hereinafter NACCP Records. In late 1961, the state took over Campbell College after its students supported a walk out at a local high school. It closed its doors in 1964 after its last students had graduated. "Campbell College," *Mississippi Encyclopedia*, August 20, 2021, https://mississippiencyclopedia.org/entries/campbell-college/.

[37]Herbert Wright to Medgar Evers, April 18, 1960, Box III: C 244, Box 3, Part III: Branch File, 1956-1965, NAACP Records; James Bradford Interview with Worth Long, April 30, 1963, Jackson, Mississippi (Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Atlanta Georgia), hereinafter cited as Bradford Interview, 3.

[38]Medgar Evers to Ruby Hurley, April 13, 1960, Box III: C 244, Part III: Branch File, 1956-1965, NAACP Records.

[39]Zack J. Van Landingham, "Boycott by Negroes, Jackson, Mississippi," Supplementary Report, April 10-17, 1960, File # 2-135-0-22-5-1-1, Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission Online, https://da.mdah.ms.gov/sovcom/, hereinafter MSSC. Dittmer calls the boycott "moderately successful." Dittmer, Local P*eople*, 86.

[40]Evers' Monthly Report, May 23, 1960, Folder Box III: C 244, Part III: Branch File, 1956-1965, NAACP Records.

[41]Evers's Monthly Report, November 18, 1960, Box III: C 244, Part III: Branch File,

In 1961, students from Tougaloo's NACCP chapter took the fateful step of exporting their integrationist ideas to the surrounding community. In March, an exultant Evers wrote to NAACP official Robert Carter to announce that "at long last we are about to commence direct action protests against racial segregation in Mississippi, Jackson in particular. Our moves will be directed against public conveyances, terminals, (including air terminal café), public library, and parks."[42] The students had good reasons for choosing the main city library for their first direct action protest. First, the library's segregation policy seemed particularly egregious since the tax dollars of Black residents helped to fund the library, but they were barred from using it. Second, Tougaloo students could claim a legitimate need to use the main library since its collection was larger than the collections at Tougaloo or Carver, the branch library for Black patrons. Third, the drive to desegregate southern libraries generally met with less resistance and violence than the movement to desegregate schools and other institutions. "Strategically," observes Michael Fultz, "civil rights activists seem to have calculated that White attitudes about library integration were somewhat less strident than those concerning the integration of other public institutions and that breakthroughs cracking the walls of segregation were more likely to be achieved."[43]

By 1961, more progress had been made in the desegregation of libraries than the desegregation of schools and other southern institutions. Blacks won access to some southern libraries even before the *Brown* decision. In 1953, an Atlanta University graduate student found that Blacks had access to libraries in forty-eight southern cities. Ten years later, another Atlanta University graduate student found that two hundred and ninety cities had desegregated libraries.[44] In general, White Southerners perceived racial mixing at libraries to be less threatening than racial mixing at schools. In the words of one White librarian, "We have shopped all our lives with Negroes—in the library you shop for a book; in the schools you have social contact."[45] There was also a class component that made southern Whites gen-

1956-1965, NAACP Records.

[42]Medgar Evers to Robert Carter, March 15, 1961, Box III: A 230, Part III: Administrative File, 1909-1969, NAACP Records.

[43] Fultz, "Black Public Libraries," 348.

[44] Knott, *Not Free, Not Free for All*, 261

[45] American Library Association, *Access to Public Libraries* (Chicago, 1963), 30.

erally more willing to desegregate libraries before schools and other institutions. "You have to realize that the class of Negroes who want to use the library is pretty high class," explained a White community leader in one southern city who did not oppose library desegregation. "Just like the Whites who use the library are high class. . . . The rough class of either race doesn't go to the library."[46] Few southern libraries, however, voluntarily desegregated. Most only did so grudgingly after facing demonstrations, lawsuits, or both.

The nine members of the Tougaloo NAACP chapter who participated in the demonstration at the Jackson Municipal Library were Meredith Anding, Jr., James "Sam" Bradford, Alfred Cook, Geraldine Edwards (Hollis), Janice Jackson (Vails), Joseph Jackson, Jr., Albert Lassiter, Evelyn Pierce (Ameenah Omar), and Ethel Sawyer (Adolphe).[47] For Geraldine Edwards, a junior who grew up in Natchez, participating in a read-in held special significance. Edwards had been barred from Natchez's main public library, but she had made regular use of the small, branch library for Blacks. She "loved to read. It was my passion because I could escape the reality of segregation and expand my thinking and my mind."[48] She credited her love of reading with her decision to attend Tougaloo.[49] Janice Jackson was a junior from Clarksdale, where she had attended a Catholic school and won a scholarship to attend Tougaloo.[50] For her, the goal of the protest was nothing less than to "establish an equal place for the Negro alongside the white man."[51] She harbored no ill will towards Mississippi Whites and blamed segregation on ignorance. "We grew up in Mississippi, we know these people; we are sorry for them."[52] Mississippians Alfred Cook, originally from Jackson, and Evelyn Pierce, from Laurel, were active in the Black Freedom Movement prior to attending Tougaloo.[53]

[46] Ibid., 28-29.

[47] "The Tougaloo Nine," Box 1, Tougaloo Nine Collection, 1960-1991 (Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi), hereinafter Tougaloo Nine Collection. Joan Collins and Mary Allen were part of the planning group but did not take part in the actual demonstration. Geraldine Edwards Hollis, *Back to Mississippi* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2011), 116.

[48] Hollis, *Back to Mississippi*, 53.

[49] Ibid., 85.

[50] A. L. Hopkins, Report to File, April 7, 1961, File # 2-13-0-23-5-1-1, MSSC.

[51] "Jackson Reaches Turning Point," *The Southern Patriot*, May 1961, 4, Box 1, Tougaloo Nine Collection

[52] Ibid.

[53] Cook's family moved to Flint, Michigan. Zack J. Van Landingham, Supplementary Report, April 22, 1960, File # 2-135-0-22-6-1-1, MSSC.

Cook, the vice president of the chapter, transferred to Tougaloo from Campbell College, where, as student body president, he helped to organize the 1960 Easter boycott.[54] Evelyn Pierce was a freshman from Laurel, where she had been a member of the local NAACP Youth Council prior to attending Tougaloo.[55] Meredith Anding, a sophomore from Jackson, and Albert Lassiter, a freshman from Vicksburg, were the other two members of the Tougaloo Nine who were native Mississippians.

The other three members of the Tougaloo Nine – Joseph Jackson, Sam Bradford, and Ethel Sawyer – were from Memphis, Tennessee. Jackson, the president of the Tougaloo NAACP chapter, was a philosophy and religion major. Edwards remembered him as a "serious student."[56] In high school an English teacher had told Jackson, "White people may hate the color of our skin, but you get an education, and that is something that they will never ever be able to take away."[57] He took the words to heart and considered his matriculation at Tougaloo as a challenge to segregation. Bradford, who attended Tougaloo on a choir scholarship, was a freshman when he joined the college NAACP chapter. After talking about the sit-ins taking place elsewhere in the South, he "felt that if something needed to happen anyplace, it would be the state of Mississippi."[58] He volunteered to participate in the library read-in because he believed he had "a personal stake in it—my future."[59] Ethel Sawyer, who graduated from Tougaloo the following year, recalled that the Tougaloo Nine staged the read-in simply because it seemed the right thing to do. "I don't think that we thought of [the read-in] as being historic," she recalled. "It was just what we felt that we should do."[60]

On the day of the Jackson read-in, the Tougaloo Nine first visited

[54] "Jackson Negro Boycott," *Jackson Daily News*, April 8, 1960, 1; Special Report of Julie Wright, Youth Field Secretary, Activities in Mississippi, April 17, 1961, Box III: E55, Part III: Youth File, 1956-1965, NAACP Records.

[55] Hal C. DeCell to Lt. Gov. Carroll Gartin, January 29, 1958, File # 2-7-0-18-1-1-1, MSSC.

[56] Edwards, *Back to Mississippi*, 108.

[57] Gabriel San Roman, "Joseph Jackson Jr. Made Civil Rights History as a Member of Mississippi's Tougaloo Nine," *OC Weekly*, June 25, 2015, https://www.ocweekly.com/joseph-jackson-jr-made-civil-rights-history-as-a-member-of-mississippis-tougaloo-nine-6442062/?sfw=pass1633513658.

[58] Bradford Interview, 1, 6.

[59] Ibid., 11.

[60] Alice Lewis, "Ethel Sawyer Adolphe Recalls Library Sit-In," May 1984, Box 1, Tougaloo Nine Collection.

the Carver Library to establish a reason to use the main library. Evers and Mangram, who both helped to plan the protest, accompanied the students to Carver and then to the main library. At Carver, some of the students requested materials they knew the underfunded library would not have. Bradford "went to my biology teacher to get some ideas of what I might request that they would surely not have down there [in the Carver Library]."[61] After visiting the Carver Library, the Tougaloo Nine proceeded to the main library, parking across the street in what was at the time a Sears and Roebuck parking lot. "When we got out of the cars," remembered Bradford, "the media was there. They popped out of the bushes or wherever they had been hiding, and the cameras started to roll." [62] The Tougaloo Nine had contacted the media to publicize the protest and to give themselves some protection against possible police brutality and angry White mobs.

The Tougaloo Nine then entered the main library. Some students sat at tables and read while others looked through the card catalog or browsed encyclopedias. Hollis recalled how big and modern the library was compared with the Black-only libraries she had always been required to use. "As I went along with the group, I glanced around to take in the interior of the building," she recalled. "It far exceeded those I had visited on other occasions."[63] Frances French, the head librarian, approached some of the students, who were looking through the card catalog, and suggested they go to the Carver Library or the College Park Library, the city's other branch library for Black patrons. French later said she directed the Black students to the other libraries because "that was the custom."[64] French was not surprised to see the Black students. Earlier in the day, two reporters had asked her whether she knew that Tougaloo students were planning to visit the library. She had called the police to inform them. Now she called the police to report that the students had arrived. A few minutes later several police officers, including Police Chief W. D. Rayfield and Chief of Detectives M. B. Pierce, arrived. Pierce told the Tougaloo Nine that they had to leave and could use the colored library. Having been trained in non-violent

[61] Robert Walker, "Tougaloo Nine: Demonstration Comes to Mississippi" (Paper, Tougaloo College, 1979), 6, Tougaloo Nine Collection.

[62] Bradford Interview, 8.

[63] Hollis, *Back to Mississippi*, 120.

[64] *Clark v. Thompson* (S.D. Miss. 1962), Transcript of Evidence, Testimony of Frances French, Box V: 1174, Part V: Legal Department, 1842-1997, NAACP Records, 70.

*Members of the Tougaloo Nine being arrested on March 27, 1961, inside the Jackson Municipal Library, which served only White patrons. Image courtesy of the WLBT Newsfilm Collection at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.*

resistance, the students remained calm and did not argue with the officer. But they also refused to obey his order. "They asked me to leave," recalled Hollis, "This was when I knew I had no *fear*. . . . My emotions were replaced with a determination to do this. I would read in this library or suffer the consequences for my innate choice to do so."[65] After a few minutes, the police arrested the students and placed them in the back of unmarked police cars.[66]

The Tougaloo Nine were charged with disturbing the peace, photographed and fingerprinted, and put into cells. Evers arranged for the students to have legal counsel and bail money, but it took more than thirty hours to get them released because the sheriff did not make himself available to approve the necessary bonds.[67] For Hollis, the time in jail seemed longer: "Some report said it was only 30 hours . . . It felt more like 72 hours!" To pass the time and deal with the anxiety, Hollis

[65] Hollis, *Back to Mississippi*, 119 (italics in the original).

[66] "Nine Jailed in 'Study-In," *Jackson Clarion Ledger*, March 28, 1961, p. 1; "Negro 'Read-In' Attempt Here," *Jackson Daily News*, March 27, 1961, 1; "Nine Seized at Sit-In at Jackson, Miss.," *New York Times*, March 28, 1961, 36. There is an unidentified video of the police arresting the Tougaloo Nine. I want to thank Wayne and Shirley Wiegand for providing me with a copy. Author's possession.

[67] Medgar Evers to Roy Wilkins, March 29, 1961, Box III: C 245, Part 3: Branch File, 1956-1965, NAACP Records.

*Tougaloo Nine being escorted by police on the steps of the Jackson Municipal Library. Image courtesy of the WLBT Newsfilm Collection at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.*

danced. "Dancing was something I could do with or without music. . . . So to pass the time for the large period of time I was jailed, I danced" she remembered. "We had to be lighthearted and strong because we knew this would be our fate."[68] During his confinement, chapter vice president Cook clowned around making jokes and climbing the bars of his jail cell. Bradford, however, was more subdued. "It was serious, real serious with me . . . .," he remembered. "I wasn't sure just what the [white guards'] next move" [would be]. But they treated us okay. . . . There was no violence, I can say that. [They] talked kind of rough to us but didn't beat us up."[69] The next day, Evers finally managed to secure the students' release on a $1,000 bail each. He was very pleased with how the students handled themselves, telling NAACP executive secretary Roy Wilkins, "These young people exhibited the greatest amount of courage in the face of mounting tension and were reported in our local newspapers as being 'orderly, intelligent, and cooperative.'"[70]

The Tougaloo Nine's unprecedented challenge to segregation in Jackson generated considerable support from the city's Black commu-

[68] Hollis, *Back to* Mississippi, 125, 124.

[69] Bradford Interview, 13-14.

[70] Medgar Evers to Roy Wilkins, March 29, 1961, Box III: C 245, Part 3: Branch File, 1956-1965, NAACP Records. Evelyn Pierce told the police she was from Buffalo, NY. Virgil Downing, Report to File, June 29, 1961, File # 2-55-4-35-1-1-1, MSSC.

nity and a violent backlash from its White community. On the night of the read-in, several hundred students from Jackson State College gathered in front of their campus library for a prayer meeting for the Tougaloo Nine. The students prayed, sang hymns, and chanted "We Want Freedom." After about forty minutes the gathering ended abruptly when the college's (African American) president Dr. Jacob Reddix, accompanied by about twenty city police officers, interrupted the protest and threatened to expel the students if it continued. "I don't know what happened," said Reddix, "This is more trouble than we have had here in 20 years."[71] The following day, two hundred students from Jackson State boycotted classes and gathered for another mass meeting on campus. About fifty of the Jackson students then began to march to the city jail where the Tougaloo students were being held. The police stopped them about ten blocks from Jackson State and, when they refused to disperse, used clubs and threatening police dogs to disband them.[72] That night, Evers organized a mass protest meeting at the Baptist Hill Church in Jackson. It "drew a capacity crowd of some eight hundred people, as well as a large contingent of Jackson City policemen."[73]

On March 29, the Tougaloo Nine went on trial at the Jackson Municipal Court. The police resorted to violence to disrupt a peaceful show of support for the students. That day more than one hundred Blacks gathered across the street from the courthouse to await the arrival of the Tougaloo Nine. The violence began when the students arrived at the courthouse and the crowd burst into applause. Evers, who was among the crowd, described the unprovoked attack in a monthly report, "Instantly, there was a call from some police officers saying 'get 'em out of here,' and it was then that the hoards {sic} of policemen and two vicious police dogs converged on the Negro Citizens only; and began whipping us with night sticks as well as extending the leashes on the dogs [so they could attack.]"[74] Evers was hit several times in the back by uniformed officers wielding billy clubs and once in the head

[71] "Jackson State College Students Protest," *Jackson Clarion Ledger*, March 28, 1961, 1.

[72] "Police Halt March by Negro Students in Mississippi," *New York Times*, March 29, 1961, 25; Dittmer, *Local People*, 88.

[73] Evers' Monthly Report, April 21, 1961, Box III: C 245, Part 3: Branch File, 1956-1965, NAACP Records.

[74] Ibid.

by a gun-wielding plain clothes officer. A minister was bitten on the arm by a dog and an eighty-one-year-old man was hit so hard his wrist was broken. Inside the courthouse, the Tougaloo Nine were convicted of breach of the peace, fined $100, and given thirty-day suspended jail sentences. Their lawyers informed the court of their intent to appeal the convictions.[75]

Many of Tougaloo's roughly five hundred students showed their support for their fellow classmates following the demonstration. When the Jackson police brought the Tougaloo Nine back to campus following their court appearance, Tougaloo students surrounded the police cars and cheered their fellow students. They "converged on us right there in front of Jamerson Hall," recalled Bradford. "I remember the expression of fear on the faces of the cops. Kids were coming out of Woodworth [Chapel]. I saw one of the cops actually reach for his gun."[76] For Bradford, the enthusiastic reception the Tougaloo Nine received from fellow students was the most memorable part of his experience. Sawyer also had fond memories of the return to campus. He recalled, "A lot of students were waiting for us when they brought us back to campus in police cars. It was a joyful time."[77]

The Tougaloo Nine's actions stirred young Blacks from across Mississippi. Black youth, many of whom were members of NAACP college chapters and youth councils, mobilized to confront segregated facilities. NAACP officials, who had been reluctant to support direct action in Mississippi out of fear it might promote extreme White violence, perhaps even incite a race war, encouraged the demonstrations.[78] The association initiated a statewide antidiscrimination program, Operation Mississippi, which among other things, called for "attempts to be made by students and other groups to test facilities available to Negroes in waiting rooms, bus and train depots, etc."[79] In Jackson, four college students from the newly formed Jackson NAACP Intercollegiate Council held a ride-in, the first in the state, against the city's segregated

[75] "Police and Dogs Rout 100 Negroes: Clash Occurs at Courthouse in Mississippi Where 9 Students Are Convicted," *New York Times*, March 30, 1961, 19; Dittmer, *Local People*, 88-89.

[76] Walker, "Tougaloo Nine: Demonstration Comes to Mississippi," 16.

[77] Lewis, "Ethel Sawyer Adolphe Recalls Library Sit-In."

[78] Williams, *Medgar Evers*, 178-179.

[79] "Program: Operation Mississippi," April 7, 1961, Box III: A 230, Part 3: Administrative File, 1909-1969, NAACP Records.

buses.[80] In addition, students from the Jackson NAACP Intercollegiate Council, the Jackson NAACP Youth Council, and the Campbell College NAACP Chapter staged demonstrations against racial discrimination in the city's public parks, swimming pools, and the city zoo.[81] In October, NAACP youth picketed the Negro Mississippi State Fair in Jackson.[82] NAACP youth carried out similar protests elsewhere around the state. In Greenville, youth council members picketed Woolworth's and other chain stores for three weeks to demand more jobs for Blacks and demonstrated against the city's segregated library.[83] In Clarksdale, four youth council members tried to buy train tickets at a ticket counter in the station's Whites-only waiting room. In Vicksburg, two members of the Vicksburg Youth Council picketed a segregated movie theatre in the city. In Gulfport, Blacks held a "wade-in" on a city beach.[84] "These and other direct action protests," writes historian John Dittmer, "were unprecedented in Mississippi."[85]

Around the state, White authorities mobilized to defend the color line and prevent any further challenges to it. Founded in 1956, the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission had been created in the wake of the *Brown* decision to protect segregation in the state.[86] Among other things, it investigated, surveilled, and harassed civil rights activ-

[80] Evers' Monthly Report, April 21, 1961, Box III: C 245, Part 3: Branch File, 1956-1965, NAACP Records; Monthly Report of Julie White, Youth Field Secretary Activities in Mississippi, April 26, 1961, Box III: E55, Part 3: Youth File, 1956-1965, NAACP Records.

[81] Evers' Monthly Report, June 21, 1961, Box III: C 245, Part 3: Branch File, 1956-1965, NAACP Records; Monthly Report of Julie White, Youth Field Secretary Activities in Mississippi, July 5,1961, Box III: E55, Part 3: Youth File, 1956-1965, NAACP Records.

[82] Gloster Current to Henry Lee Moon, October 18, 1961, Box III: A 230, Part 3: Administrative File, 1909-1969, NAACP Records.

[83] Evers' Monthly Report, July 28, 1961, Box III: C 245, Part 3: Branch File, 1956-1965, NAACP Records.

[84] Monthly Report of Julie White, Youth Field Secretary Activities in Mississippi, September 6, 1961, Box III: E55, Part 3: Youth File, 1956-1965, NAACP Records; Dittmer, *Local People*, 89.

[85] Dittmer, *Local People*, 89. On July 20, 1962, four black youths did manage to use Jackson's main library for about an hour and then left. The police arrived afterwards and stationed an officer in the library to "maintain peace, harmony, and quiet" and "keep undesirables out." "Four Jackson Youth Explore Advantages of Municipal Library," *Mississippi Free Press*, July 28, 1962, 1, 3.

[86] On the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, see Yasuhiro Katagiri, *The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission: Civil Rights and States' Rights* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2001); Jenny Irons, *Reconstituting Whiteness: The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2010); and Michael J. Butler, "The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission and Beach Integration, 1959-1963: A Cotton-Patch Gestapo?", *The Journal of Southern History* 68 (February 2002): 107-148.

ists. Shortly after the Jackson read-in, Albert Jones, the commission's director, instructed his investigators to conduct background checks on the Tougaloo Nine. The objective was to dig up dirt that could be used to discredit the students. But the commission's investigators came up empty. One investigator even traveled to Memphis, Tennessee, to research the backgrounds of Jackson, Sawyer, and Bradford. After consulting with the Memphis Police Department and interviewing other sources, the investigator found nothing untoward. They were reported to be good students, with good reputations. The investigator could find "no [criminal] record of any kind involving these three students."[87]

In Jackson, White political and civic leaders moved to defend the city's racial order. Mayor Allen Thompson took to the airways to insist there was no racial conflict in Jackson. He told local television stations that the city had always enjoyed "racial harmony."[88] Even though most of the Tougaloo Nine were from Mississippi and all of them were from the South, he blamed "outsiders" for trying to destroy "our mutual good will."[89] At the same time, some of city's "most prominent men" called a meeting of newspaper, television, and radio reporters and for ninety minutes tried to persuade them to "blackout the news" of the read-in and the subsequent police violence.[90] Local White leaders also tried to get the Tougaloo Nine to drop their legal appeal. A special board of the First Christian Church of Jackson, one of the city's leading White churches, met with Tougaloo president A. D. Beittel and told him that they would pay the students' fines if they pled guilty and abandoned their appeal.[91] Beittel, however, refused to even present the offer to the Tougaloo Nine. Beittel, a northern, White liberal, who was committed to racial equality, was very supportive of civil rights activity among the

[87] Hugh Boren to File, April 11, 1961, File # 3-23A-2-106-2-1-1, MSSC. There are numerous MSSC files pertaining to the Tougaloo Nine.

[88] "Jackson Reaches Turning Point," Tougaloo Nine Collection.

[89] Ibid.

[90] "We Don't Want Censorship on the News in Jackson," *Northside Reporter*, April 16, 1961, Box 1, Tougaloo Nine Collection.

[91] The board took this action because it wanted to avoid further adverse publicity. The First Christian Church was a Disciples of Christ church, which was officially a trustee of Tougaloo College. First Christian Church pastor Roy Hulan visited Tougaloo regularly and even served as a guest preacher. However, most of the church's members opposed Hulan's outreach and the church's relationship to Tougaloo, and did not want any more fallout from the read-in. Beittel quotes the board as asking him, "Do the students know how much harm they have done to First Christian Church?" A. D. Beittel, Handwritten Notes of a Meeting with a Special Board of the First Christian Church of Jackson, April 17, 1961, Box 1, Tougaloo Nine Collection; Lyon, *Sanctuaries of Segregation*, 27-28.

college's faculty and students. In a letter to one of the board members, Beittel suggested that nothing short of desegregating the library would stop the appeal. "If Jackson were willing to do what Memphis did under similar circumstances," wrote the Tougaloo president, "that is, to open the library to all citizens of Jackson without discrimination, it is probable that the students would reconsider the matter and be willing to have the suit closed."[92]

In 1961, the color line held in Jackson. Civil rights protests were not enough to persuade the city's White officials to desegregate the main library or any of its other public facilities. So, on January 12, 1962, the NAACP filed a lawsuit in federal court to force Jackson officials to grant Blacks access to the main library, parks, and other recreational facilities.[93] The plaintiffs were three Black city residents, including eighty-one-year old W. R. Wren, who had suffered a broken arm during the police attack against Black supporters of the Tougaloo Nine. The defendants were Mayor Allen C. Thompson and other city officials. None of the Tougaloo Nine was a plaintiff in the suit, but the NAACP made their arrests the centerpiece of their case. During the trial, two members of the Tougaloo Nine, Ethel Sawyer and Janice Jackson, gave evidence, as did several other people, about the incident. The NAACP sought to prove that Jackson police had been enforcing unconstitutional state segregation laws when they arrested the Tougaloo Nine. The lawsuit asserted that state segregation laws violated the Fourteenth Amendment and thus the constitutional rights of the Tougaloo Nine and "thousands of Negroes in Jackson and all other parts of Mississippi . . . who are racially segregated in the use and enjoyment of public recreational facilities" in the city.[94]

However, Judge Sidney Mize, the federal judge who presided over the case, rejected the NAACP's argument and ruled in favor of the defendants. During the trial, Jackson officials and their lawyers contend-

[92] Campbell and Rogers, *The View From Tougaloo*, 196-199; Williamson, "This Has Been Quite a Year," 562-564; A.D. Beittel to Bayard T. Van Hecke, April 19, 1961, Box 1, Tougaloo Nine Collection. I could find no information about the outcome of the Tougaloo Nine's appeal. As late as 1965, the matter was still not resolved. A.D. Beittel, Oral History, Jackson, Mississippi, June 2, 1965 (Millsaps College Archives, Jackson, Mississippi), 4.

[93] "Ban Jim Crow Laws, NAACP Asks Federal Court," NAACP Press Release, January 19, 1962, Box III: A109, Part 3: Administrative File, 1909-1969, NAACP Records.

[94] *Clark v. Thompson*, Complaint, 6-7, Box V: 1174-1175, Part V: Legal Department, 1842-1997, NAACP Records.

ed that segregation in the city was voluntary and that the arrest of the Tougaloo Nine was not an attempt to enforce state segregations laws. In his testimony, Mayor Thompson claimed city authorities had never needed to enforce segregation because White and Black residents chose to live separately. He credited voluntary segregation for making Jackson a special place. Segregation "is a matter that has worked out for the best interests, happiness, [and] peaceful living together [of the races]. It is a matter we have never had to worry about . . . . We have never had to insist on it. It is something that has made this city the outstanding city, frankly, in the whole world."[95] In his testimony, W. D. Rayfield, the chief of police, even denied knowing there were state segregation laws and depicted the Tougaloo Nine as outside agitators who were rightly arrested for disturbing the peace. "They come into a quiet city where we had not had any violence whatsoever," asserted Rayfield. "We were getting along very nicely. They come with an intent to cause something and to test out something. And my contention was that the best solution in a case of that kind was to remove the source" of the disturbance.[96] In his opinion, Mize blithely accepted the defendants' statements at face value and failed to acknowledge the all-encompassing nature of racial segregation in Mississippi. He concluded that the "defendants are not enforcing separation of the races in public recreational facilities in the City of Jackson. The defendants do encourage voluntary separation of the races . . . . [But] voluntary separation does not violate the Constitution of the United States which does not prohibit a municipality from permitting, authorizing, or encouraging voluntary segregation."[97]

*Clark v. Thompson* reveals much about the slippery, adaptable nature of segregation. Following the *Brown* decision, Mississippi enacted a series of laws designed to strengthen and protect segregation, including the law the NAACP challenged in *Clark v. Thompson*. The statute required Mississippi officials to prohibit "the causing of a mixing

[95] *Clark v. Thompson*, Transcript of Evidence, Plaintiff's Exhibit #2, Deposition of Mayor Allen C. Thompson, 163, Box V: 1174-1175, Part V; Legal Department, 1842-1997, NAACP Records.

[96] *Clark v. Thompson*, Transcript of Evidence, Testimony of W.D. Rayfield, 203, Box V: 1174-1175, Part V: Legal Department, 1842-1997, NAACP Records.

[97] *Clark v. Thompson*, Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law and Declaratory Judgement, 333, 335, Box V: 1174-1175, Part V: Legal Department, 1842-1997, NAACP Records. Mize did admit legal segregation was unconstitutional and that "each of the three plaintiffs has the right to unsegregated use of public recreational facilities in the City of Jackson." Ibid., 339.

or integration of the White and Negro races in public schools, public parks, public waiting rooms, public places of amusement, recreation or assembly" in the state.[98] Segregation laws, however, proved to be vulnerable to legal attack and were not designed to deal with civil rights protestors. So, Mississippi legislators went back to the drawing board and enacted additional laws to get around court rulings and stop the sit-ins.[99] The law used against the Tougaloo Nine was a wide-ranging "breach of peace" statute. The 1960 law stated that anyone who "disturbs the public peace, or the peace of others, by violent, loud, or insulting, or profane, or indecent, or offensive, or boisterous conduct or language, or by intimidation, or seeking to intimidate any other person or persons, or by conduct which may lead to a breach of peace . . . shall be guilty of a misdemeanor."[100] The law, which carried a fine of up to $500 and six months in jail, gave Mississippi authorities a pretext to arrest civil rights protestors, including the Tougaloo Nine, without having to invoke statutes that were blatantly segregationist and constitutionally suspect. It allowed Mayor Thompson and other White authorities in Mississippi to uphold White supremacy while maintaining the fiction of equal justice.

In 1963, however, mass protests forced Thompson to drop the color barrier to the library and some other facilities. The protests were the culmination of the civil rights struggle in Jackson, which started with the Tougaloo Nine and continued in fits and starts until it grew into a mass movement.[101] The final stage of the Jackson struggle began in December 1962, when the North Jackson NAACP Youth Council, under the guidance of Tougaloo professor John Salter, called for a boycott against downtown stores and started picketing them to protest discrimination against Black workers and consumers. The boycott began slowly but gained momentum over a period of several months as more students, older Black residents, and the NAACP national office joined the effort. The turning point came on May 28 when a White mob attacked Salters and a group of students during a sit-in at a Woolworth's lunch counter. The violence brought pressure on Mayor Thompson to nego-

[98] Quoted in Wiegand and Wiegand, *Desegregation of Public Libraries,* 153.

[99] Dittmer, *Local People*, 59; William M. Kunstler, "Law and the Sit-Ins," *Nation*, November 4, 1961, 351-354

[100] House Bill No. 560, May, 5, 1960, Box 1, Tougaloo Nine Collection.

[101] On the 1963 Jackson Movement see, Salter, Jr., *Jackson, Mississippi: An American Chronicle*; O'Brien, *We Shall Not Be Moved*; Dittmer, *Local People*, 157-167.

tiate with protest leaders after months of stonewalling. After making an agreement, however, Thompson refused to honor it.[102] His duplicity sparked mass demonstrations and mass arrests. The growing unrest climaxed with the brutal murder of Medgar Evers.[103] The slaying of the prominent civil rights leader prompted the personal intervention of President Kennedy, and a quick resolution was reached.[104] In exchange for an end to demonstrations, Thompson basically agreed to his earlier concessions. He pledged to hire Black policemen and school crossing guards, upgrade the employment of Black sanitation workers, and continue discussions with Black leaders. Thompson also "quietly" desegregated the city's main library and its recreational facilities. He pledged not to block Black access to the library and other facilities "so long as they do not try and take them over or create incidents."[105] Although Thompson certainly did not meet all the demands of the Black protestors, his concessions were an important milestone—they marked the first time Jackson's White officials had been forced to alter the city's color line.

In 1963, the burgeoning civil rights movement in Jackson and other parts of Mississippi sparked protests against segregated libraries elsewhere in the state. In Clarksdale, Blacks filed suit to desegregate the city's library and picketed in front of the building.[106] In Ruleville, George Raymond, a twenty-year-old voter registration worker, tried to use the town's Whites-only library after seeing posters urging people to visit the library during National Library Week. After entering the library, a White man told Raymond it was not integrated and ordered him out. On his way home, Raymond's car was pulled over, and he was arrested by Ruleville mayor Charles Dorrough. It was Dorrough who had put up the posters.[107] In September, a group of Black citizens

[102] "Ministers Claim Mayor 'Broke Faith' on Concessions," *Mississippi Free Press*, June 1, 1963, 1, 3.

[103] On the murder of Medgar Evers, see Williams, *Medgar Evers*, 267-304.

[104] "Meeting Halts Marches; Voting Campaign Begins," *Mississippi Free Press*, June 22, 1963, 1.

[105] "Jackson Mayor Refuses School Negotiations," *Southern School News,* July 1, 1963, 3. Thompson refused to desegregate restaurants or schools or form a biracial committee, but Jackson's bus and train stations and its airport were also desegregated. "In South: Negro's Grow More Insistent of Rights But They Meet Stiff Opposition from Whites," *New York Times*, June 16, 1963, 141.

[106] "Clarksdale Suit Opposes City Bias," *Mississippi Free Press*, April 20, 1963, 4; "Clarksdale Protests Bring 36 Arrests Within Past Week," *Mississippi Free Press*, June 29,1963, 2.

[107] "Arrest Vote Worker for Visit to Library During Library Week," *Mississippi Free*

from Laurel gave a list of civil rights demands to their mayor. This list included a demand to allow Blacks to use the library "as any other citizen."[108]

In 1964, the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (CRA), which among other things, outlawed segregation in libraries and other public facilities, triggered protests against Mississippi libraries that failed to comply with the law.[109] On August 13, more than a month after President Johnson signed the landmark bill, a group of Black students from a Freedom School in Hattiesburg entered the Whites-only library accompanied by their teacher Sandra Adickes, a White woman from New York City, and asked for library cards.[110] The librarian called the police, who under orders from the mayor, removed the students and closed the library supposedly for an inventory.[111] When the library reopened a few days later, six more Freedom School students and four of their teachers, including William D. Jones, a Black teacher from New York, tried again to use the library. Jones and the other teachers were arrested, and the library closed once again.[112] The library reopened the following month with a new policy requiring all patrons to obtain a new library card approved by the library board. African Americans could apply for the new cards, but, as a local newspaper openly acknowledged, "It would be less than realistic to suppose the application of Negroes would result in cards which would get into the main library which has never been used by other than whites."[113] In September

*Press,* May 4, 1963, 1, 3.

[108] "Bi-Racial Committee Wanted; Laurel Mayor is Attentive," *Mississippi Free Press*, September 7, 1963, 1.

[109] *The Civil Rights Act of 1964*, Pub L 88-352, July 2, 1964.

[110] In the summer of 1964, Mississippi civil rights groups launched Freedom Summer, an ambitious project aimed at registering blacks to vote and advancing the cause of civil rights in the state. Setting up Freedom Schools for black children was part of the program. The project was met with considerable violence. On Freedom Summer, see Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988); Carson, *In Struggle*, 111-129; and Bruce Watson, *Freedom Summer: The Savage Season of 1964 that Made Mississippi Burn and Made America a Democracy* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2010).

[111] "Library Closed After Integration Attempt," *Hattiesburg American*, August 14, 1964, 1; "An Oral History with Sandra Adickes," October 21, 1999 (University of South Mississippi Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage, Hattiesburg, Mississippi), 20-23.

[112] "An Oral History with Umoja Kwanguvo [formerly William Jones]," June 8, 1999 (University of South Mississippi Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage, Hattiesburg, Mississippi), 29-30.

[113] "City Library Open to Card Holders," *Hattiesburg American*, September 9, 1964, 1, 5.

1964, Indianola closed its main library rather than let Blacks use it. City officials later opened a "library" for African Americans in an old grocery store to discourage them from trying to use the main library. The Black community boycotted it. In February 1965, a White librarian in Vicksburg's main library turned away Black students who tried to check out books.[114]

As these examples illustrate, most Mississippi libraries did not immediately desegregate after the passage of the CRA. But the new law ultimately compelled them to do so. It prohibited public libraries and other entities that received federal dollars from discriminating against African Americans and authorized federal agencies to withhold money from those entities that failed to desegregate.[115] By 1964, the federal government was an important source of funding for libraries. It began funding library services for rural libraries in Mississippi and across the nation in 1957 through the Library Services Act. The act helped to extend library service to 40 million people living in rural communities.[116] In 1964, President Johnson signed the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA), which increased the amount of money the federal government allocated for libraries and expanded the funding to include urban libraries and the construction of new libraries.[117] Mississippi, which was one of the poorest states in the nation, desperately needed federal dollars to maintain and expand its meager library services. In 1965, for instance, Mississippi received $419,383 under the LSCA for the construction of seven new libraries.[118] However, if the state's libraries continued to bar Black patrons, they risked the loss of future federal funding.

In the end, Mississippi's libraries complied with the CRA and opened their doors to African Americans. In March 1965, Lura Currier, the director of the Mississippi Library Commission (MLC), the state agency responsible for administering LSCA funds, mailed the boards of trustees for the state's public libraries a "statement of compliance," which they had to sign and return to verify their compliance with the

[114] Wiegand and Wiegand, *Desegregation of Public Libraries*, 165-166.

[115] Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 specifically prohibits discrimination in federally assisted programs.

[116] John C. Frantz, "The Library Services and Construction Act," *ALA Bulletin* 60 (February 1966), 149.

[117] Ibid.

[118] "Fiscal 1965 Projects," Folder 8, Box 9, Currier Papers.

CRA's non-discrimination requirements. In a cover letter, Currier advised library boards to accept the CRA as "the law of the land, and try to work out good library service for your public in that framework."[119] During the next year, most of Mississippi's libraries signed the statement. In a March 1966 letter to a federal official, Currier detailed the widespread compliance with the CRA among Mississippi libraries. Of the fifty-five public libraries in the state subject to the law, Currier reported that forty-two had signed compliance forms and only thirteen had "failed to comply" and thus were ineligible for federal funding. She speculated that some of the thirteen libraries that had not signed were probably serving African Americans but did not want to publicize the fact.[120] The Hattiesburg Library was one of the library's that dropped its color barrier.[121]

On March 28, 1961, it might have appeared as if the segregationist wall was as strong as ever in Jackson, Mississippi. That day, thousands took to the streets of the capital to cheer the more than 5,000 people who took part in the Civil War Centennial parade, the largest in the state's history. The huge crowd delighted in the booming cannons, the marching bands, the world's largest Confederate flag, and celebrated the South's defense of White supremacy one hundred years earlier.[122] But the day before, not far from the parade route, nine Black students from Tougaloo College challenged the parade's racist message when they walked into the Whites-only Jackson Municipal Library with their heads held high and expected the same library service as White patrons. The Tougaloo Nine's dignified demonstration forever changed the racial order in Jackson and across the state. As Samuel Bailey, a local NAACP leader in Jackson, observed a couple of weeks after the historic event, "Mississippi ain't what it used to be."[123]

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[119] Lura Currier to Rev. L. C. Blanton, Chairman, Board of Trustees, Ellisville Public Library, March 5, 1965, Folder 13, Box 1, Currier Papers.

[120] Lura Currier to David Seeley, Acting Assistant Commissioner, Equal Educational Opportunities Program, Office of Education, March 22, 1966, Folder 12, Box 11, Currier Papers. Currier admitted there was a "wide variation in the nature and degree" of the compliance in the forty-two libraries that had signed. Ibid. On Currier's complicated relationship with library segregation, see Karen Cook, "Struggles Within: Lura G. Currier, the Mississippi Library Commission, and Library Services to African Americans," *Information and Culture* 48:1 (2013), 134-156.

[121] Mary Love, Associate Director, Mississippi Library Commission, to Honorable Robert Edward Anderson, July 21, 1966, Folder 12, Box 11, Currier Papers.

[122] "Giant Parade Draws Crowd to Centennial," *Jackson Clarion Ledger*, March 29, 1961, 1, 12.

[123] NAACP Youth Dispatch, May 10, 1961, Box III: E 54, Part III: Youth File, 1956-

After shaking up the racial order in Jackson and across Mississippi in 1961, members of the Tougaloo Nine continued to advance the cause of Black civil rights throughout their lives. A few months after the protest, James Jackson left Tougaloo and returned to Memphis. He later relocated to Orange County, California, where he completed his college education, earning a degree in sociology. As a member of Orange County's small African American community, he was often the only Black person wherever he went. "To me, I was still breaking down barriers the same way I broke down racial barriers in Mississippi," Jackson was quoted as saying. "I never abandoned civil rights."[124] Sam Bradford also left Tougaloo shortly after the read-in. He moved to Chicago but eventually returned to Mississippi and finished his degree. Like Jackson, Bradford did not participate in another civil rights protest, but he did continue to agitate for racial change. Whether working as an auditor for the Mississippi Medicaid Commission or as a claims adjustor for an insurance company, Bradford was always "a fly in the glass of buttermilk" who spoke out against racial discrimination.[125] Ethel Sawyer graduated from Tougaloo in 1962. She went on to earn a master's degree and taught at various colleges during a long career in higher education. She did not participate in another demonstration, but she quietly remained a civil rights activist. As she waited to give her plea in the Jackson courthouse following the arrest of the Tougaloo Nine, Sawyer had thought to herself, "If my presence in this white library disturbs your peace, then I am guilty."[126] This became her mantra throughout her life. "If my presence in this place, in this room, in this job, in this position, on this earth disturbs your peace, [then I am guilty]."[127] Geraldine Hollis also graduated from Tougaloo in 1962. She later moved to Oakland, California, where she earned two advanced degrees and retired as an administrator in physical education in the Oakland school system. She approached her career in education as an extension of her activism in 1961. "My life work has been to give, reach, and teach. . . . My experience as a member of the Tougaloo Nine was a

1965, NAACP Records.

[124] San Roman, "Joseph Jackson Jr. Made Civil Rights History as a Member of Mississippi's Tougaloo Nine."

[125] Bradford Interview, 9, 16-17.

[126] Ethel Adolphe, Panel Discussion on "Hidden Figures in American Library History: The Desegregation of Public Libraries in the Jim Crow South," New Orleans Public Library, June 24, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGFgTpXYspc.

[127] Ibid.

foundation builder" for my career.[128]

The unprecedented defiance Hollis and the other members of the Tougaloo Nine displayed at the Jackson Municipal Library helps us to see Black college campuses as a center of civil rights organizing. Tougaloo offered its students, faculty, and staff a safe space where they were free to explore integrationist ideas, develop civil rights strategies and organizations, and mount demonstrations. In addition to the library protest, Tougaloo students, faculty, and staff participated in demonstrations in Jackson against racial discrimination in city stores, churches, and the state fair. They took part in voter registration drives, political campaigns, and other civil rights activities throughout the state.[129] In 1964, Mississippi's legislature, angered over Tougaloo's role as an incubator of civil rights activism, considered a bill to remove the college's state charter. Tougaloo survived, but the controversy and the college's continuing role as a "movement center" hurt its finances and contributed to the replacement of President Beittel.[130]

The Jackson read-in also demonstrates the importance of NAACP youth chapters to the sit-in movement of the 1960s. Along with SNCC and CORE, the NAACP, through its youth chapters, mobilized young Blacks and supported direct action against segregated facilities across the South. The NAACP national office was more comfortable challenging segregation through the courts and Congress, but its youth chapters pushed the association to take a more confrontational approach to securing racial justice. The Tougaloo Nine, all members of the college's NAACP chapter, took direct action against segregation in Jackson. The success of their library read-in, the first direct action protest in the capital city in the 1960s, helped to convince the national office to support further demonstrations by NAACP youth chapters in Jackson and elsewhere around the state. The collective efforts of the association's youth chapters advanced the cause of civil rights in Mississippi.

Finally, the Tougaloo Nine's read-in highlights the struggle to

[128] Hollis, *Back to Mississippi*, 282-283.

[129] See, for example, Tougaloo student Anne Moody's excellent memoir, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (New York, 1968), which chronicles her civil rights work in the state. Tougaloo pastor Ed King was very active in the Jackson movement, the vice-presidential candidate for the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in 1963, and an organizer of Freedom Summer. On his affiliation with Freedom Summer, see Ed King and Trent Waters, *Ed King's Mississippi: Behind the Scenes of Freedom Summer* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2014).

[130] Williamson, "This Has Been Quite a Year for Heads Falling," 564-569; Katagiri, *The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission*, 152-158.

desegregate public accommodations and underscores the importance of libraries. Although the segregation of public accommodations like libraries might seem insignificant compared to job and housing discrimination, the fact is that thousands of African Americans risked their lives to gain access to public accommodations. This number includes hundreds of Blacks who protested library segregation. We need to take their actions seriously and try to understand why access to libraries and other facilities was so important to them. As college students, the Tougaloo Nine appreciated the value of libraries for Black education and social advancement. They also understood that it made sense to strike first against Jackson's segregationist wall from within the relatively safe confines of a library. A library demonstration was less provocative than targeting a segregated school or pool and offered a better chance for success. In the end, their strategy was successful. Their protest helped to spark a broader civil rights movement in Jackson that led to the eventual desegregation of the Jackson Municipal Library and other public accommodations in the city. The Tougaloo Nine's courageous act produced the first crack of what became a large fissure that ultimately destroyed the segregationist wall in Jackson.

*Tougaloo Nine, 1961, Courtesy of the Jerry W. Keahey Sr. Collection at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.*