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“Last Flag Standing”: How Traditional Conservative Values and Symbolic Voting in the State of Mississippi Help Explain the Defense of the Confederate Flag by Voters in the 2001 Referendum

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The University of Southern Mississippi

“Last Flag Standing”:

How Traditional Conservative Values and Symbolic Voting in the State of Mississippi Help Explain the Defense of the Confederate Flag by Voters in the 2001 Referendum

by

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A Thesis

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Abstract

Mississippi is the last state in the United States to publicly display the confederate symbol as part of its state flag. In 2001, when given the chance to remove this symbol from its flag, voters in Mississippi supported this symbol by a vote of 2 to 1. Previous studies have documented the importance of race in the outcome of the 2001 referendum, but lack analysis of other potential influential factors specific to the state of Mississippi. This study examines the issue of the Mississippi state flag through a case study analysis using the ballot initiatives of Amendment 1 in 2004, the constitutional ban on gay marriage, and Initiative 26 in 2011, known as the “personhood amendment”. This study finds that Mississippi voters make use of traditional social conservatism and symbolic voting on social ballot initiatives, and this may explain why the state supported the confederate symbol in 2001 despite its problematic nature. This study helps to further understand Mississippi political culture, and the unique case of the Mississippi flag in the context of 21st century American and Southern politics.

Key Terms: conservatism, symbolic voting, traditionalist, ballot initiative

Dedication

To Mom, Dad, and Jacob.

Without each of your support, love, humor, and ability to put up
with me, I would not be where I am today.

Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Problem and Research Question

Mississippians are often reminded of the state's tendency to be the "last" in nearly every negative category. At times, the state has ranked poorly in per capita income, quality of education, obesity rates, and many other undesirable categories. However, there is one category that brings a surprising amount of pride to many Mississippi citizens: it is the last state in the US to display a confederate symbol on its state flag. States such as South Carolina and Georgia removed Confederate symbols from their flags in 2000 and 2001 respectively, while this symbol flies proudly above houses, businesses, and government buildings of Mississippians both inside and outside the state. Mississippians are slow to advocate for change on many issues such as same-sex marriage, legalization of marijuana, prayer in public schools, and abortion, just as they are in regard to the state flag. Although not all of these issues have not been put to a direct public vote, the issue of the Confederate symbol on the Mississippi flag was. In 2001, Mississippi offered its citizens the opportunity to remove the Confederate symbol from its flag through popular referendum. By a margin of 2-1, Mississippi's voters elected to keep the old flag that remains the last Confederate symbol publicly displayed by a state government in the United States.

This paper contributes to the previous academic literature that shows the 2001 Mississippi Flag referendum is related to racial attitudes, and holds that traditional social conservatism and symbolic voting are also important factors to consider in analyzing the results of the 2001 referendum and the longevity of this symbol in general in the state of Mississippi. Many studies have already documented the voting split in Mississippi along racial and economic lines, though there is little discussion over *why* there was such a

strong response to retain the Confederate symbol, or the reasons the flag might remain 14 years later.

This lack of discussion is problematic both for the academic community, and the state of Mississippi, as this issue pervades a single vote or period in time. Indeed, this issue of the Confederate flag is a relevant part of Mississippi's socio-political makeup, and has yet to be explored in greater academic detail. The issue is complex; politicians and citizens alike still dispute the choice of the state to use the Confederate symbol as part of the state flag, though few call for its removal. Exploration into the broader context in which a symbol such as the Confederate can be justified in the 21st century is as relevant as it is complicated, especially given that discussions of systematic racism resurge once again in the United States in the aftermath of the death of black teen Michael Brown and the Ferguson, Missouri movement. Above all, it is necessary to help Mississippians understand the implications of such a symbol, and for non-Mississippians to see that this symbol's permanence is a product of much more than the vestiges of racism remaining in the state today.

This paper seeks to answer the question, "How did Mississippi's voters justify the decision to keep the Confederate symbol on its flag in 2001 despite the symbol's problematic nature and history?" This paper uses an analysis of historical data, relevant literature, and an examination of Mississippi's political culture as seen through this and two other ballot initiatives: Amendment 1 in 2004 and Initiative 26 in 2011. This study finds that Mississippians voted to keep the Confederate symbol due to their traditionalist conservative values and the symbolic nature of the vote. This argument is twofold; the flag itself is clearly problematic and is equally important in a racial context, but its

presence tells us a considerable amount about the political makeup of the state of Mississippi and why its citizens may feel this symbol is worth saving. This broader understanding of this symbol is useful to scholars writing or researching about the state, or the symbol itself in a modern context. This is also useful in a cultural context, to help explain important aspects of political culture in the Deep South, in regard to social change and voting on citizen ballot initiatives. Further research and testing is needed to strengthen the findings of this study, but this is an important first step in explaining the political actions and reasoning in the state of Mississippi that lead to outliers such as the case of the Confederate symbol on the state flag.

Chapter 2: Literature Review of Important Concepts and History of the

Mississippi Flag:

Political Symbols and Symbolic Voting:

There are many interesting issues that are unique about the case of the Mississippi state flag. The symbol may seem meaningless even to some who live within the state, but to many it represents the history and background of the state as well as a symbol of rebellion against increasingly progressive social cultures. This symbol is representative of a stand against the mainstream political sphere that these citizens so detest. The primary symbol of a state is usually meant to help unite the state, but in Mississippi's case, the flag continues to divide its populace between new and old, white and black. The world sees the Confederate symbol used by neo-Nazis, Klansmen, and racists as a similar representation of Mississippi.

In the Rosman, Rubel and Weisgrau book "The Tapestry of Culture: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology", the authors write "Political Symbols may seem

trivial, but, in reality, people will rather die than deny them or give them up. People's identity or concept of self as members of a group is powerfully bound up with such symbols." (Rosman, Rubel, & Weisgrau 93). This is the primary concept with which this research is dealing. In order to understand a people, many different parts of their culture must be examined. The Mississippi flag is but one distinctive part of Mississippi culture, but it is a powerful symbol. As we will see, many individuals feel incredibly strongly about the most prevalent remaining symbol of the confederacy, its flag. This issue manifests itself within the social and political cultures of Mississippi, and is especially interesting, as so many other cultures have rejected the use of this symbol as acceptable, either politically or socially.

In Mari Womack's book *Symbols and Meaning: A Concise Introduction* she explains, "In general terms, symbols are images, words, or behaviors that have multiple levels of meaning... But the meaning of a particular symbol is culturally assigned rather than inherent in the symbol itself" (Womack 2005). Thus, when we examine political symbols such as the flag, we must look at much more than the flag itself. It is established that these symbols are important in understanding a broader group such as the state of Mississippi. However, these symbols are incredibly complex, and represent different things to different people. While a Mississippian might see a confederate flag and think of their heritage or pride in their state, a New Yorker or a Californian might think only of the racist, antebellum south or of slavery and oppression of minorities. Therefore, it is important to remember when analyzing the impact these symbols have and their continued existence. If we prescribe one meaning to a symbol based merely on pre-drawn

conclusions about a populace or its voting habits, we are doing a disservice to the importance of these symbols as powerful both socially and politically.

This is a powerful statement, echoed by many in both the fields of anthropology, sociology, and even political science. Specifically, one major study on the Mississippi flag focused on this distinction of symbols as politically significant and representative of a group. They state openly that societal values and political ideology of citizens play a key role in the way a state identifies itself through symbols (Karahana and Shughart 2004). These identifying characteristics and symbols are a culmination of the thoughts, actions, and values of the collective group of individuals who identify with one another. However, it is difficult to translate these values into a symbol that represents a large and diverse group of people. In this way, the state flag of Mississippi is not representing the entirety of its population. Rather, the symbol stands to divide the citizens of Mississippi along different planes of identity.

This article by authors Karahana and Shughart titled, “Under Two Flags: Symbolic voting in the state of Mississippi” explains this concept in regard to the 2001 referendum. They state that the Mississippi flag referendum asked citizens to register their opinion on the state flag, not any other issues. Their vote had no specific instrumental consequences, and thus this can be described as a purely “symbolic” vote. (Karahana and Shughart 2004). This “symbolic” vote then was a gateway for citizens to vote based on their perception of the issue, rather than its specific policy or legal implications. If a citizen believed that the other states were pressuring Mississippi to enact change it was not comfortable with, a citizen could easily register this opinion through a vote to maintain the old flag, even if they did not believe strongly in the flag itself. This concept broadens the political

spectrum of voters in the 2001 referendum to any number of political issues that the flag might represent to Mississippians, whether racial, political, or historical. Just as Womack stated, “The meaning of symbols is arbitrary” (Womack 2005). This allows for analysis on not just the symbol, but rather what it represents and why.

In short, the vote on the flag was emblematic of broader cultural attitudes, and thus is an issue on which deeper political beliefs are registered. Citizens showing support for the flag are not supporting policy change; instead they are supporting an idea.

Karahan and Shughart show us that the individual citizen will see the issue of the flag as a matter of principle, not one of definite consequences. This can directly impact how citizens vote, as we see in the example of the 2001 referendum vote.

History of the Mississippi Flag:

In order to understand the context of this political symbol, its history must be briefly discussed in order to highlight how this controversy originated. This is important not only to understand the problematic nature of the Confederate symbol and thus the Mississippi flag itself, but also the concept of why this symbol is important on a broader political level. The state of Mississippi became sovereign when it seceded from the Union in January of 1961. The Confederate States of America (or CSA) did not yet exist as a formal entity until a month later in February, and thus Mississippi could not yet join the CSA. That month, the Mississippi secession convention adopted an official flag for the Sovereign Republic of Mississippi.

"The Magnolia Flag" (figure 1.1) depicted a Magnolia tree on a white field, with a red fringe or bar on the right side and a single white star on a blue field in the canton of the flag (Sansing 2000). This was the first official flag of Mississippi, and in some ways

was the only time in Mississippi history that the state flag was not an issue of contention. There are even some who advocate that Mississippi should return to this flag today due to the Magnolia tree being a popular symbol of the state. However, some say that this design was not favored because of the difficulty of standardizing this design, as the magnolia tree is intricate, and may not be easily recognizable in smaller form. Thus, the first “true” flag of the state seems to have been lost to history.

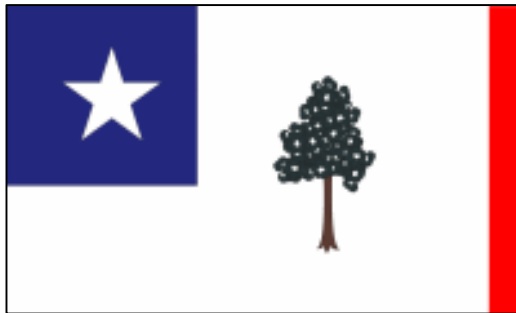


Figure 1.1: “The Magnolia Flag” (1861) (Sansing 2000)

Though Mississippi flew the flags of the CSA from 1861 to 1865, the Magnolia Flag actually remained the "official" flag for 33 years (Sansing 2000). The next flags that flew over Mississippi were the first, second, and third flags of the confederacy, pictured below in order (Figures 1.2, 1.3, 1.4). These flags represented total inclusion in the rebellion against the Union, and these sentiments may well be still present in the retention of the confederate symbol present on the last two of these flags.



Figure 1.2: “First National Flag of the Confederacy” (1861) (Sansing 2000)



Figure 1.3: “Second National Flag of the Confederacy” or “Stainless Banner” (1861-1863) (Sansing 2000)

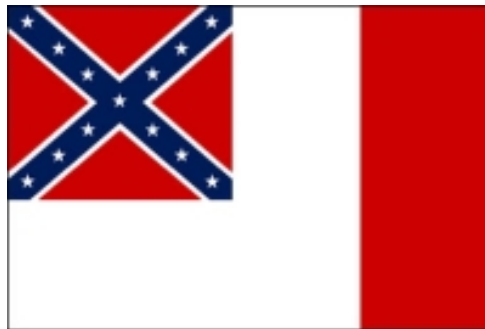


Figure 1.4: “Third National Flag of the Confederacy” (March 1863- 1865) (Sansing 2000)

The second and third flags of the confederacy contained the “Confederate symbol” as referred to in this paper, also known as the “Confederate flag” (figure 1.5) by many in the United States today. This symbol was popularized by the Army of Northern Virginia as a battle flag, created to distinguish from the first Confederate flag which was very similar to the union flag. The thirteen stars are said to represent the 13 states of the Confederacy.

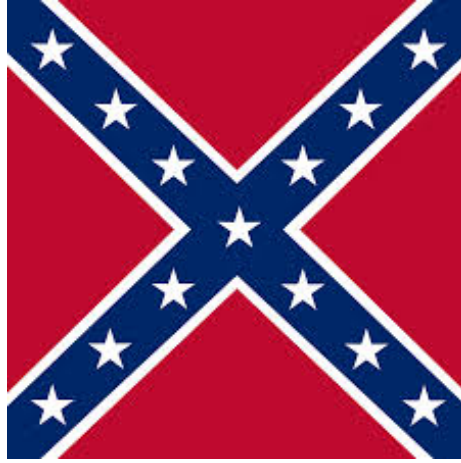


Figure 1.5: “Battle Flag of the Army of Northern Virginia” the “Confederate Flag” or the “Confederate Symbol” (1861-1865) (Sansing 2000)

On February 7th, 1894, legislation that led to the adoption of an official State flag after the civil war was approved and enacted the flag we know today as the Mississippi state flag. This flag continued the trend of both the second and third national Confederate flags by using the Northern Virginian battle emblem in the canton of the flag (figure 1.6) (Sansing 2000).



Figure 1.6: “Current Mississippi State Flag” or “1894 Flag” (1894-present) (Sansing 2000)

With movements in Alabama, South Carolina and Georgia set to remove the “Confederate symbol” from their flags (GA) and state capitols (AL and SC) in 1999,

there were also both legal and social movements to do the same in Mississippi. In a case filed by the NAACP to remove the Confederate symbol from the flag, the Supreme Court found in 2000 that the state had not officially adopted the design in 1894. An official flag was not included in the new state constitution of 1901, and thus legislation was needed to officially adopt a state flag. Given the surrounding controversy on the use of the confederate symbol, governor Ronnie Musgrove decided to appoint a commission to design a new flag without the Confederate symbol. This decision on the final version of the state flag was put to a popular referendum in 2001 in order to minimize potential political backlash.

The commission decided on the design pictured below (figure 1.7) as an alternative to the 1894 flag. Although the historic Magnolia flag was proposed to the commission, and was discussed in its private and public sessions, the commission opted for a non-historic design that resembles the 1894 flag but without the Confederate battle emblem. According to the commission, the magnolia tree would be difficult to standardize, and thus difficult to replicate for use as the state flag. The symbolism of the twenty stars was meant to represent the fact that Mississippi was the 20th state to join the Union.

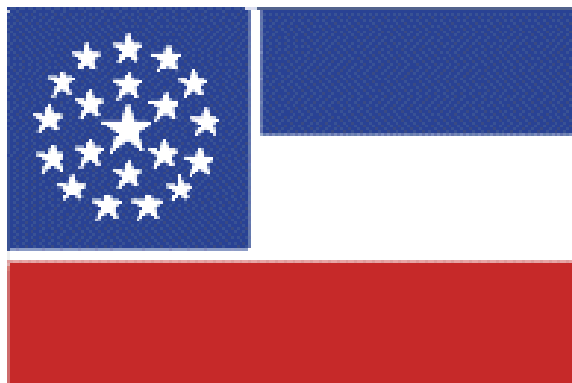


Figure 1.7: “2001 Proposed New Mississippi Flag” (2001) (Sansing 2000)

The 2001 State Flag Referendum results:

Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina each previously displayed the confederate symbol above their state capitols as mentioned earlier. These states saw the problematic nature of this symbol and, under pressure from internal and external sources, chose to remove it completely or replace it with similar non-controversial symbols such as seen in the proposed 2001 flag (figure 1.7). Georgia even removed the symbol before allowing its citizens to vote on a new flag, and then had to undergo a referendum that could have led to the return of the pre-2001 Georgia Flag, which also displayed the same confederate symbol as the Mississippi flag. However, its citizens voted by a margin of 71% to keep their current flag, thus solidifying the state's decision to change this symbol as a representation of the state (Georgia Secretary of State's Office).

Mississippi politicians were given the opportunity to remove this symbol through executive and legislative means, but chose to send the issue to a referendum in 2001 in order to absolve themselves from blame if their decision was viewed unfavorably. This decision would prove beneficial, as Mississippians bucked the trend of other Southern states and chose to retain their Confederate flag. In each of these states, the same issues of racism were present, yet Mississippians voted differently on the same issue. When examining data from Mississippi, the explanation of racism leaves the question of African American voters in Mississippi and the differences from other states unanswered.

A total of 767,682 citizens voted in the statewide referendum in Mississippi, with 64.4% voting for the 1894 design, and 35.6% voting for the new design. The most interesting data from the results comes from the split along racial lines. According to the Desoto Times analysis of election data, the "1894 flag won 17 black majority

counties...and also won a 60% margin of approval in the Delta counties, the highest majority of black voters in the state.” (Salter 2010). A pre-election poll by the Clarion-Ledger also found that 69% of African-Americans believed that the flag was divisive and offensive to some groups and should be removed (Orey 2007). This leaves 31% of African Americans who believed the symbol was either NOT divisive enough racially to merit its removal, or did not have an opinion. This is why further explanation of other values, in this case social conservatism, is needed. This issue did not mobilize African American voters in the way many groups, including the NAACP had hoped. This means that the racially motivated argument cannot fully explain voter participation or motivation in the 2001 referendum outcome.

As for whites, 76% said the flag is a symbol of heritage and should be preserved (Orey 2007). In general, there seemed to be consensus that whites voted primarily for keeping the old flag, while African Americans voted primarily against it, but there were exceptions on both sides at the time. This data is especially interesting to note, as it begs the question: why did some African Americans vote for or believe in the old flag with the Confederate symbol? And why did so many whites defend this symbol given its failure in other states at the same time with similar racial distributions? Given the history of the flag and its roots in Confederate actions and the clearly demonstrated problems with the symbol in the modern American political sphere, how was such a decision justifiable? Simply put, the entrenched values of social conservatism were at work alongside racism. To further illustrate this claim, this paper will look to relevant literature on both the concept of social conservatism and the case of the Mississippi Flag.

The Mississippi Flag in Academia and the Academic problem with the flag:

A variety of academic studies have already examined the issue of the Mississippi flag across different dimensions. First, an article titled “Black, White, or Green? The Confederate Battle Emblem and the 2001 Mississippi Flag Referendum” sought to find the major contributing factors to the outcome of the 2001 referendum. The study examined a number of variables and their relationship to the voting outcomes in the referendum, such as voting for George Bush in the 2000 presidential election, those who had moved from another state to Mississippi, religious affiliation, employment in the manufacturing industry, among others. The study found that race was the highest contributing statistical factor to voting patterns, with African American citizens having an extremely negative correlation to support for the 1894 flag. They found that while other factors did have statistically significant correlations, none were nearly as strong as race with white voters overwhelmingly supporting the 1894 flag (Leib and Webster 2012). However, the study was heavily focused on measurable data, and thus avoided variables that are more difficult to measure, such as social conservatism.

A second study, “A Tale of Two Flags” by D’andra Orey uses the comparative method to examine two referenda in Mississippi and the 2004 flag referenda in Georgia that ended in the opposite outcome. He again argued that race was the major contributing factor in the Mississippi referendum while Georgia’s much different referendum in 2004 voted against the Confederate symbol on their flag across racial lines. Overall, the author concludes that Mississippi’s referendum allowed its white majority to undermine the black opinion on the flag (Orey, 2005). However, the study also fails to extend its analysis past racial lines, not providing potential reasons for such a split other than the

presence of race itself. This is problematic because it ignored other issues at work in these two states and provides an incomplete analysis. Accounting for the strength of traditions and history in Mississippi as compared to Georgia would likely yield a more complete explanation of these two different results.

Other approaches have also used the case study method to compare Mississippi's 2001 referendum to a similar vote or decision possibly involving racial motives. The article "Accounting for Racism: Responses to political predicaments in two states" compared the 2001 referendum to Arizona's 1990 referendum to establish a new state holiday honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to understand how seemingly racial political decisions are justified. This article analyzed media and individual citizens commentary on each of the events as they unfolded and recorded and categorized each reaction. The study then recorded the frequency of concepts discussed, and found that the issue most prevalent in Mississippi and Arizona during these referenda was the preservation of the state's history and traditions. This research directly supports my argument that traditional social conservatism played a major part in how voters defended the flag in Mississippi. All in all, there is a surprising lack of academic literature on the Mississippi flag itself, and the literature that does exist focuses primarily on race. This is why the argument for social conservatism is so important, because it helps to explain a unique phenomenon that a single measure cannot adequately explain.

Mississippi's flag causes significant controversy, and its presence is potentially problematic for the state for a variety of racial and historical reasons involving the connotations of the Confederate symbol it uses. It is the "Confederate" (or Beaugard) battle flag in the canton of the Mississippi flag that has garnered interest from northern

onlookers, organizations like the NAACP, and others throughout its 120 year tenure as part of the state flag. Many see this symbol as evidence of the state's troubled past with racism and slavery, an allusion to the Civil War era, or even indicative of "redneck" culture. These connotations are problematic and indeed surprising in a state whose population is 37.8% African American in 2013 (US Census Bureau 2014).

There are more than a few examples that illustrate how the flag is viewed as problematic throughout the United States. Most recently, the Mississippi flag came under scrutiny from the Orange County BAR Association. In January of 2014, the Orange County BAR sought to remove the Mississippi flag from the Santa Ana civic center where it now hangs along with the flags of the other 49 states. The group says the Confederate symbol is an outdated relic that represents racism and hatred, and thus is a "hate symbol" that deserves to be removed from display (Chumley 2014). In fact, the flag's symbolism has often sparked controversy all over the country. On July 8th of 2014, The Washington Post reported that Washington and Lee University has chosen to discontinue use of the Confederate battle flag after black students protested its display (Shapiro 2014). This flag hung in Lee Chapel, named after General Robert E. Lee whose battalion flew this flag. At a university in which General Lee himself is buried and where he served a term as university president, his own battle flag is still a controversial symbol to display publicly, much less represent the university or any other entity.

Other schools have dealt with controversy surrounding the Confederate flag within their own student populations. For example, in Missouri public schools, displays of the Confederate flag were banned for students to wear because of an increase in racial comments and harassment among students. This ban was subsequently challenged in

court on the grounds of free speech. An article in the Missouri Law Review by Lucinda Housley Luetkemeyer describes the troublesome nature of the Confederate battle flag and why the court upheld the school's decision to ban the symbol. She states, "The Confederate flag waves with symbolism and ignites passion from those who fight to display it and those who fight to banish its display" (Luetkemeyer 2010). This is because of the intense connotations of "freedom" and/or racism inherent in the confederate symbol.

Luetkemeyer extrapolates this point by providing examples of many school districts and other organizations since 1974 that have banned this symbol due to an increasing number of race-related incidents. The court upheld that this flag met the standard of "a reasonable forecast of substantial disruption" in schools (Hudson 2009). In many of these situations, the students who were banned from displaying the flag were just as upset as students who were offended by the flag, and this escalated conflict. These situations create escalating conflict between parties on both sides; regardless of what symbolism or meaning each side chooses to give to the symbol. While these examples seem to explain why the flag should be changed, they only simplify the issues of changing the state flag in the Southern states. Each of these studies shows that the flag is a problematic symbol that can invoke negative racial histories, but all are examples of states outside of the south. While these states are aware of the possible racial implications of the symbol, they do not deal with the complex history of race relations and strong sense of traditionalism experienced in the Southern region. Yet even in these examples, the implications of the flag go beyond race alone as they involve both historical and regional differences.

Traditionalist, or Burkean Social Conservatism:

To further analyze if social conservatism was at work in Mississippi, we must look to literature on this subject. Before moving forward, there is a strong distinction between “social conservatism” and “traditional social conservatism” that is important to the functions of this study. The term “social conservatism” is often used in many different contexts, and is usually perceived as a function of the political views on social issues of the Republican Party, or a set of views on social issues in modern politics that social conservatives support. Justin Quinn, a conservative political expert explains that modern social conservatives support positions such as “Advancing pro-life stances, a ban on gay marriage, protecting the Second Amendment right to bear arms, maintaining a strong national defense, opposing illegal immigration, and lifting the ban on school prayer” (Quinn 2015). Each of these issues specifically relates to modern political issues since the Reagan administration, and is linked but fundamentally different from the concept of “traditional social conservatism”. Thus, the views of the Republican Party, or on occasion the Tea Party, become the agenda of social conservatives.

On the other hand, traditionalist social conservatism specifically focuses on historical precedent, aversion to change, and the need of a system to protect itself from outside influence. While these views often lead traditionalists to support bans on gay marriage or opposing illegal immigration, traditionalists do so because of a different set of values. For example, a traditional social conservative would support a more isolationist foreign policy, while modern neoconservatives would support military intervention and an active foreign policy (Quinn 2015). These distinctions are important when discussing

symbolic issues like the Mississippi flag, as these are indicative of beliefs much deeper than modern political lines.

The particular strand of social conservatism that might explain Mississippi's attitudes toward social change is that of Edmund Burke. As Peter J Stanlis explains in the First Principles Intercollegiate Studies Institute online journal, "history, conceived as providential development and empirical experience, was an important part of Burke's political philosophy" (Stanlis 2011). Burke placed high importance on historical symbols in politics because historical experience taught governors the cardinal virtue of temperance. History provided warnings against seeking violent change through ideological revolution, and Burke believed any rapid social change would bring negative consequences. (Stanlis 2011). In short, Burke believed that societal change was rarely a positive thing without the proper amount of time and deliberation. Burke said that that people should use history and experience to guide their moral and political philosophies rather than follow a more progressive ideology. In the case of the Mississippi flag, Burke would presumably believe that if the public were not ready for a change to be made, the old flag should remain. This result is indicative of traditional social conservative values also playing a role in the decision to keep the 1894 flag. However, there are other views on traditionalist social conservatism that focus less on history as Burke did, and more on the concept of social change.

Another group whose ideology can be seen in the state of Mississippi is that of the "Southern Agrarians". They published a book titled "I'll Take My Stand" in 1930, in response to growing national criticisms of Southern life and culture, in particular the idea that the south "ought to keep up with the times". This book outlined an argument for

traditionalist lifestyles and an aversion to social change just because other parts of the country disagreed with their values. As Ralph E. Ancil put it, “The Agrarian philosophy was thoroughly steeped in the culture, tradition, and history of the Christianized West. It took seriously the linguistic connection between “culture” and “agriculture,” holding that a humane civilization requires rootedness and permanence and that it must be protected from thoughtless change (Stanlis 2011). True social conservatives look at rapid, major shifts in social norms of a country or region as a disruption and a hindrance to growth as a society and favor much slower, deliberate progress. These principles can be easily connected to the sentiments of voters in Mississippi, as seen through both academic studies and relationship of these principles to the idea of changing the flag, or any symbol for that matter.

One article in particular, published in the journal *Personality and Individual Differences*, titled “Disgust: A predictor of social conservatism and prejudicial attitudes toward homosexuals” examines this aversion to change frequently seen throughout American Southern politics. This article uses the term “behavioral immune system” to describe a social system’s need to maintain its own health, much in the way biological systems seek to mitigate contact with outside systems to avoid harmful substances. According to the article, the “(the) behavioral immune system should encourage individuals to prefer in-group members over out-group members” (Terrizzi, Shook, and Ventis 2010). This study analyzed this concept through the example of attitudes, or “disgust” with gay marriage, as a function of social groups seeking to maintain their social order and identity.

This article tests this aversion to out-groups using the example of gay marriage, which we will delve into again later within the context of Mississippi's gay marriage ban known as Amendment 1. The study found that opposition to gay marriage was correlated with this "behavioral immune system", social conservatism, and even religious fundamentalism. This shows that this concept of aversion to change is applicable when discussing aversion to change within a system, such as the state of Mississippi. This "behavioral immune system" may be applicable in discussion of the state flag, as "in-group" Mississippians rejected change that was supported by outside groups and rejected by the dominant political ideologies within the state.

This basic understanding of what this study will refer to as "traditional social conservatism" is integral to answering why Mississippians supported the confederate symbol's use on the Mississippi flag. While there can be no single understanding of this concept, it is fair to summarize these concepts as the desire to maintain the social status quo, whether it is to "maintain the roots of society" as the Southern Agrarians would maintain, or protect a social system from outside influence which could bring unwanted change.

Chapter 3 Methodology:

Research on the concepts described thus far in the paper shows that these concepts are incredibly difficult to quantify, and many potential methodologies have had to be ruled out. First, there is little to no data available that properly addresses the concepts surrounding the longevity of the Mississippi flag, or the justifications of voters who decided to keep this flag. The only available data includes the 2001 referendum results, which are poorly documented, without any available information on the voting

outcomes in regard to race, gender, or many other characteristics that might provide more information. There were also no recorded exit polls that can be used to determine attitudes or other voting rationale. In general, there is no way to quantify the primary issue this paper addresses, “support for the Mississippi Flag” given the data available.

With no available data, primary data is the next potential technique, but this method is also highly problematic for this study. In order to address the question of the 2001 referendum, attitudes of voters from 14 years ago would be necessary, which is not possible. Even if this study were to focus on present attitudes, the same issues arise with operationalizing concepts, and are furthered by the issue of a survey sample. This sample would need to be representative of the state in order to address the overall outcome of the 2001 referendum. Unfortunately, this research would likely only reach college-age or younger individuals, who would be easily accessible, but were not eligible to vote at the time of the referendum and would likely have a much different view than other citizens in the state. Thus, a survey instrument turns out to not be useful in this case.

There are also no appropriate “dummy” variables that properly address the questions this paper seeks to answer. Characteristics such as “history/heritage” and “change averse” are immensely difficult to quantify, and there are no proper substitutes for these incredibly abstract, frequently shifting terms. Also, the concept of traditional social conservatism is difficult to quantify. Olson and Green write, as many other authors have, of the strong connections between religiosity and conservatism (Olson and Green 2006). However, these connections primarily address the more modern concept of conservatism, or Neo-conservatism. This is not the same as traditional social conservatism, or Burkean conservatism, which is of primary interest to this research. The

most recent scale that measures or focuses on Burkean conservatism is the McClosky scale (McClosky 1958), but even this is incredibly old, and not reliable for a study 60 years after its publication. Replication of the McClosky scale using updated data would be a project far beyond the scope of this research project. Therefore, it is impossible to conduct a purely quantitative study using available data for purposes of answering the question, “How did Mississippi’s voters justify the decision to keep the Confederate symbol on its flag in 2001 despite the symbol’s problematic nature and history?”

Thus, this paper uses a case study of other citizen votes on similar issues seeking similarities in the concepts presented, in order to address the issue of the Mississippi Flag. To do this, each initiative or citizen vote initiated since 1992, the year the initiative process was re-legalized in Mississippi, is examined in order to determine if there are any suitable cases similar to the 2001 Mississippi Flag referendum. Initiatives from other states are not relevant to this study, as the research question specifically focuses on the state of Mississippi, and the closest means by which to analyze the electorate’s voting patterns on social issues is by looking at their direct opinions through ballot initiatives. This study uses two criteria to determine if these ballot initiatives are suitable to compare to the 2001 flag vote: the symbolic nature of the initiative, and if the initiative involved aversion to social change. These two concepts are integral to the study of the Mississippi flag and the 2001 referendum, and these concepts must be present in order to evaluate these initiatives side by side. Only initiatives that were placed on the ballot are selected for use, and not initiatives that failed in some form to reach the ballot. This is because the results of these initiatives are important to the discussion of these concepts and whether or not they are similar to the results seen in the 2001 referendum.

After compiling this list and selecting initiatives that meet these basic criteria, these cases are analyzed through the same lens as the Mississippi flag referendum, focusing on how these initiatives began, media coverage of these votes, political action supporting and opposing these initiatives, how these decisions show the views of voters and citizens, how these votes demonstrate Burkean conservative values, and the symbolic natures of the votes. Each of these concepts are explained within the literature review, but are further expanded upon and analyzed within the context of the cases selected. This analysis provides further insight into how Mississippians justify their decisions on social issues, and if their aversion to change plays a significant role in their political decision-making on direct referenda votes.

Ballot Initiatives since 1992 in Mississippi:

Initiative # and topic (in brief)	Year on Ballot	Potentially Symbolic?	Deals with social change?	Passed?
4- Term limits	1995	No	No	No
9- Term limits	1999	No	No	No
15- Voter ID	2011	Yes	No	Yes
26- Personhood Amdt	2011	Yes	Yes	No
31- Eminent Domain	2011	No	No	Yes
MS Amdt. 1- Gay Marriage Illegal	2004	Yes	Yes	Yes

Figure 2.1 (Mississippi Secretary of State’s Office)

Surprisingly, there have been very few Mississippi initiatives to actually make the ballot since 1992 when the process was legalized. Only three times has the legislature sponsored a ballot initiative, most recently in 2014 when the state passed overwhelmingly

the “constitutional right to hunt” for Mississippi residents. The other two measures took place in 1998 and were also passed overwhelmingly. These were “to provide that only a resident of the state may circulate an initiative petition” and “to give victims of crimes the right to be informed, present, and heard during the criminal process“ (*Mississippi Secretary of State’s Office*). As the chart above shows, only a few of these issues were social in nature, and only two ballot measures fit the necessary criteria. The first is citizen initiative 26, or the “Personhood amendment”. This initiative wanted to amend the Mississippi constitution to stipulate that personhood begins at conception, for the purposes of outlawing abortion in the state more permanently. The second is MS Amendment 1, which stipulated that legal marriage and the rights thereof shall only be given to a marriage between a man and a woman. This also effectively made gay marriage illegal in the state, and stated that same-sex marriages from other states were not valid in Mississippi. These two ballot initiatives are the most reasonable case studies by which to test the research question, and the hypothesis that Mississippians are strongly influenced by traditional social conservative values and the symbolic nature of these votes, that polarize their voting outcomes.

Two ballot initiatives, Amendment 1 and Initiative 26, are analyzed in order to see if the hypothesis that the Mississippi flag referendum results were due to traditional social conservatism and symbolic voting. These cases will help to further advance or detract from the argument that Mississippians ultimately kept a problematic symbol on their state flag because of the strong presence of these influences. If these two cases corroborate the evidence presented, then it can be reasonably assumed that this

hypothesis has merit. If these cases do not show similar examples of symbolic voting and traditional social conservatism, we must reject this hypothesis.

Chapter 4: Results and Analysis:

In order to test the hypothesis that Mississippians voted to retain the confederate symbol on the state flag in 2001 due to traditional social conservatism and the symbolic nature of the vote, this and two alternative ballot initiatives are examined. These cases are all strong examples of the unique political culture in the state of Mississippi, and will provide great insight into the reasons Mississippi may have retained this problematic symbol as its state flag. This result is indeed an American political phenomenon in the 21st century, and it deserves to be examined through the lens of the electorate, rather than merely the problems with the use of the confederate symbol.

These cases will provide specific examples for analysis within the framework of this study, and will help determine if these three cases each support the research hypothesis. These examples will also help to demonstrate the concepts discussed in the literature review in a more tangible way. The comparative analysis will also help to highlight if contingencies exist for specific social or symbolic issues in the state, and if the 2001 referendum has any unique properties not present in the other two cases. First, the example of the 2001 referendum is discussed, followed by Amendment 1 in 2004, and finally initiative 26 in 2011.

2001 State Flag Referendum:

This study argues that the results of this election were influenced by two key factors that are uniquely connected and important within the context of the 2001 referendum. These two factors are traditional social conservatism and the symbolic nature of the vote. Given the relevant literature on these issues, the results of the referendum, and the history of the Mississippi flag, these factors have a clear influence on voters. Even though the flag vote and the continued use of the confederate symbol is seen as problematic by media outlets, politicians, and legal experts alike, the citizens of Mississippi voted overwhelmingly in support of their flag.

The historical portion of this study showed a direct connection between Mississippi's current flag, and its roots in the confederacy. However, this is true with other states, such as Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina. These states, unlike Mississippi, chose to remove public display of this historical connection, which suggests that factors are present in Mississippi that are not present in these other states. Though many factors played a role in each of these decisions, the state of Mississippi seems to cling to these symbols and connections more strongly than other Southern states.

Even today, an active ballot initiative known as Initiative 46 seeks to amend the Constitution to restrict or define Mississippi's heritage in the areas of "religion, official language, state flag, nickname, song, motto and state university mascots and designate the month of April 'Confederate Heritage Month'" (Mississippi Secretary of State's Office), according to official initiative language found on the Mississippi Secretary of State's webpage. This is a state in which citizens feel so strongly about these associations that they do not merely advocate for them, they want them in the state's Constitution. In

many Mississippi junior high and high schools, students spend entire semesters in courses called “Mississippi Studies” to learn about their state heritage and the confederacy. The University of Mississippi’s mascot is the “rebels”, and the university had to remove the phrase “The South Will Rise Again” from its official fight song in 2009 (Associated Press 2009). Anecdotally speaking, there are a plethora of examples to show the strong cultural connections to the confederacy and the state’s desire to resist northern influence. However, this is not enough to prove that the state valued its “history” enough to retain the 1894 flag.

The values of traditional social conservatism also line up directly with the argument for keeping the flag. This is important to understand the outcome of this election as this hypothesis helps to account for voters who were either not racially motivated or would have not otherwise voted for the flag containing the confederate symbol. In general, states enjoy boasting about their history and in many ways rely on it for unity and cohesion among their citizens. As previously discussed, history is an important part of these symbols, as “people will rather die than deny them or give them up” (Rosman, Rubel, & Weisgrau 93). In this regard, the meaning of the Mississippi flag is different to those who view it externally and to those who display it in their own windows. While some see it as the problematic symbol mentioned earlier in this paper, others clearly defend it using the phrase “Heritage, not Hate”.

While this statement seems more like a clever alliteration than a reasonable defense for the Mississippi flag, it actually seeks to prove the relevance of the flag as a piece of history that many people believe should be preserved. To Mississippi citizens, it is historically and culturally important rather than a symbol that should be viewed as a

hateful relic, even if they are one of the only groups to see it in this light. While some may still view the flag as a symbol of white superiority, others see it as part of their unique culture and lifestyle. This need to relate to a strong local culture may also stem from the state's issues in other areas, such as education, poverty, and obesity. In a state that is incessantly reminded of its own failures, this cultural acceptance within the state is an "in-group" that may help these individuals to meet their "love/belonging" and "esteem" needs, a la Maslow's Hierarchy of needs. Regardless of these motivations, the actions of Mississippians remain the same: they support their state and their history even if others tell them it is wrong.

Given this viewpoint, it is understandable to see why the concept of changing the symbol would be troublesome for Mississippians who live in a culture that constantly reminds them that their ancestors "fought and died for" the Confederacy. The analysis of "Accounting for Racism" supports this along with the slogan of the state after the referendum, "Heritage, not Hate". To remove this symbol would violate this history, and traditional social conservatism would bring us to the same conclusion. Whether for racial, historical, or social means, removal of the state flag is directly contradictory to these citizens "behavioral immune system" (Terrizzi, Shook, and Ventis 2010). Not only would removal of this symbol show that outside influence and pressures had prevailed, it also would force Mississippians to reject the beliefs and attitudes of the "in-group" they have been conditioned to protect.

Given that traditional social conservatism prioritizes "rootedness and permanence", it is unsurprising that Mississippians would value the maintenance of the flag. Traditional conservatives believe that rapid social change is inevitably flawed, and

that more deliberate, slower social change is most likely to be widely accepted and take hold. In many ways, the same values present in traditional social conservatism show themselves in the decision to keep the flag. Mississippians are slow to move on other issues as we will see through the second example of Amendment 1, and as we have seen on countless other topics throughout the state's history such as racial integration in schools and abortion. While other states seek social change and progress, these same cultural battles are still being fought in the state of Mississippi to this day. Though these issues have benefits in their own right, the state of Mississippi is likely to move slowly on these issues as well, following these traditionalist values.

Even today, the issue of the state flag is rarely addressed in the media unless other states find fault with it, such as in California or Virginia. Even these media narratives play into the idea that other states cannot understand Southern tradition, as argued by the Southern Agrarians. This plays into the concept of Mississippi as a state "rebellious" against these attacks on its culture. This need for Mississippi to defend itself against ideological attacks enhances the need to retain these symbols, in order to maintain cultural identity. In general, the values of traditional social conservatism and the retention of the Mississippi flag seem to align, but even more so when considering the real implications of the vote itself. Racism alone cannot account for these cultural differences and realities, and thus social conservatism should be viewed as another major factor in the decision to retain the 1894 flag.

Another major factor in the 2001 referendum is the fact that the vote was a symbolic one rather than a consequential election. The previously cited studies on these referenda have proven that voters were invested in the issue of the flag as a symbolic

vote. Voters had to decide if the 1894 flag was the best representation of the state and its history to the rest of the world, and if they believed that the flag had enough negative connotations to warrant its removal. While advocacy campaigns were somewhat able to influence voters, the inherent ideologies present within the state were a huge inhibitor for these campaigns to overcome. This is not to say that the election was meaningless; the high turnout for a special election shows that the citizens thought otherwise.

However, the citizens of Mississippi as cited in Karahan and Shughart, did not believe that the vote would change anything directly about how the state operates. In many cases the citizens who could have made the vote much closer chose not to vote due to the inconsequential nature of the issue, or even voted for the 1894 flag (Salter 2010). This apathy among those who opposed the 1894 flag may show that symbolic voting is a mobilizing issue for traditional conservatives in Mississippi, in which case this will be shown through the other cases to be examined.

Had this vote advocated for tangible policy differences, the outcome could have been different. As earlier argued by Karahan and Shugart, the vote on the flag was a symbolic one in which citizens merely needed register their opinions about a flag. If the vote had created specifically racially biased laws or prejudicial treatment in a tangible or instrumental way, it is highly unlikely a similar result would have followed even if the racial argument is accepted *prima facie*. However, the symbolic nature of the vote allowed both those with traditional conservative and racist value systems to demonstrate their ideological principles without tangible consequences. In lieu of national pressures to change the flag, the “rebellious” nature of Mississippians who treasure conservative

heritage was likely triggered, and thus we saw the defense of a problematic symbol without regard to the potential problems with this symbol.

However, the flag vote was also seen as symbolic due to the opportunity of citizens to use this vote as demonstrative. Aside from the lack of tangible policy implications on daily life, this was an opportunity for voters to show how they *felt* about their own identity, and the attack on their “behavioral immune system”. A vote in support or even against the 1894 flag had demonstrative purposes to the state, the national media, and the rest of the country. In this case, previous studies have documented this vote as demonstrative of racism among white voters “White Racial Attitudes” and “Accounting For Racism”. However, these studies ignore the demonstrative potential of the flag vote as a preservation of Mississippi culture, protection of the behavioral immune system, or even the rejection of northern attitudes.

Each of the studies examined help show that these factors influenced voting outcomes in the 2001 referendum, as the state flag can be seen as both symbolic and important to traditional social conservatives. Next, we must see if these same factors are present in two other ballot initiatives in the state of Mississippi. If these factors are present in these other cases, this will support the hypothesis that Mississippians were influenced by symbolic voting and traditional social conservatism.

Amendment 1, or the 2004 gay marriage ban

As previously demonstrated, political symbolism is an important factor in the culture and representation of a group of people through the example of the Mississippi Flag. However, in the other two cases of Amendment 1 and initiative 26, there is a lack of political symbolism. While these issues can be “symbolic”, meaning that they are seen as

representative of a larger political culture or belief, they do not necessarily fall into the same category as the example of a flag, or a tangible image for voters. This is important, as the “symbolism” of these two votes is even more subjective than the issue of the state flag. While the state flag has a specific history and image that can be documented and changed for specific reasons, these policies of gay marriage and abortion are perceived in quite a different manner. For this reason, analysis on these issues is imperfect, but still relevant and useful to the research question.

First, the 2004 ballot initiative known as “Amendment 1” is examined. This ballot initiative was referred by the state legislature, similar to the 2001 flag issue in that the legislature chose not to register their opinions on the issue, but rather wanted the populace to decide through popular referendum. This initiative was also on the ballots of 11 other states in 2004, and is considered by some to be an election tactic used by the republicans in order to increase turnout for George W. Bush. The article “Same-Sex Marriage Ballot Measures and the 2004 Presidential Election” agree that this tactic was indeed effective, both in Mississippi and across the nation. The authors even mention that these social ballot initiatives galvanize and raise overall voter turnout in general (Smith, DeSantis and Kassel 2006). While it is possible that overall turnout for a presidential election affected the outcome of this vote, this supports the argument that this vote was symbolic and important as a preservation of the social status quo to Mississippians, as the results were so definitive.

The text of the adopted amendment, which is found at Article XIV, section 263A of the Mississippi Constitution, states:

Marriage may take place and may be valid under the laws of this state only between a man and a woman. A marriage in another state or foreign jurisdiction between persons of the same gender, regardless of when the marriage took place, may not be recognized in this state and is void and unenforceable under the laws of this state (Mississippi Secretary of State's Office).

It is important to note that this amendment did much more than merely make gay marriage illegal in Mississippi; it also made void same-sex marriages or unions from other state, further reinforcing the idea that Mississippi specifically wanted to take a social stand against these marriages across the country. This also breaks federal law, as it violates the "Full Faith and Credit" clause in article IV, section 1 of the U.S.

Constitution. This is another example of a decision by Mississippi voters that is seen as problematic by the rest of the country, especially as gay marriage is now effectively legal in 37 states after many federal court rulings overturned these gay marriage bans, including the one in Mississippi which is still pending higher review (Pettus 2014).

This measure passed overwhelmingly in Mississippi, on a margin of 6-1, with 84% of voters voting "Yes" on the amendment, and 14% voting "no". This was greater than any other margin in the United States of similar provisions banning gay marriage the same year (Human Rights Campaign), as seen in Figure 3.1 below. Mississippi's vote is once again interesting as compared to other states voting on a similar issue during the same time period of about 3 years. Mississippi is one of only 3 states that had greater than 80% approval for a gay marriage ban, or the top 10% in the votes against gay marriage. Further data can be seen in figure 3.1 below, which shows the results of each citizen vote on gay marriage bans across the country

State Ballot initiative votes on Gay Marriage Bans

State	Year	% Yes - Gay Marriage Ban
Mississippi	2004	86
Tennessee	2006	81
Alabama	2006	81
Louisiana	2004	78
South Carolina	2006	78
Georgia	2004	76
Oklahoma	2004	76
Texas	2005	76
Arkansas	2004	75
Kentucky	2004	75
North Dakota	2004	73
Missouri	2004	71
Nebraska	2000	70
Kansas	2005	70
Hawaii	1998	69
Alaska	1998	68
Nevada	2002	67
Montana	2004	67
Utah	2004	66
Idaho	2006	63
Ohio	2004	62
Florida	2008	62
Michigan	2004	59
Wisconsin	2006	59
Virginia	2006	57
Oregon	2004	57
Colorado	2006	56
Arizona	2008	56
South Dakota	2006	52
California	2008	52

Figure 3.1 (Human Rights Campaign)

This social issue polarized many states, and remains one of the more controversial topics in the country, and yet Mississippians did not struggle at all with this decision. This begs the question, “what was different in Mississippi?” While the results are by no means an extreme outlier, usually controversial issues that find their place on the ballot are much closer than a 6 to 1 margin, as seen in Mississippi. Even accounting for factors such as the number of republican voters in the 2004 election cycle, public opinion of gay marriage, and a variety of other factors associated with opposition to gay marriage, these results are still somewhat surprising. Thus, when examining this case in the context of symbolic voting and traditional social conservatism, many similarities with the case of the Mississippi flag referendum and the relevant literature are present. However, there is one new factor that may help to explain the margin of victory for this initiative that was not present in the 2001 referendum: religious affiliation.

Gallup Polls, which as previously stated ranked Mississippi the most conservative state in the United States in 2012, also ranked Mississippi the most religious state in the country that same year (Newport 2012). The poll states that 61% of Mississippians consider themselves “very religious”, and only 10% consider themselves “nonreligious”. This was a potential mobilizing factor that could have led to the strong result in favor of the amendment. As the aforementioned article “Disgust: A predictor of social conservatism and prejudicial attitudes toward homosexuals” found, religious fundamentalism is correlated with opposition to gay marriage. Indeed, polling data supports this claim, as Pew Research center says that in 2004, only 34% of Protestants (not including Catholics, which are a minority in the state of Mississippi) supported legal gay marriage (Masci 2015). Compare this to Gallup’s historical report on gay marriage

support, which states that 43% of Americans in 2004 supported legal gay marriage (Gallup 2015). Not accounting for differences in the state of Mississippi specifically, both the academic literature and the poll data show that religious individuals support gay marriage less than nonreligious individuals.

This may have played a factor in the results, but religion can also be incorporated in the symbolic nature of the vote. Rosman, Rubel, and Weisgrau explained that identity as members of a group and self-concept are inevitably tied, and thus symbolic expression of religion is another way that individuals can see a social issue as symbolic. This can be true for a voter both individually as a member of that group, and as indicative of how they view the state of Mississippi or want the state to become. In this way, this factor is not present in the case of the Mississippi flag, but may support the claim that symbolic voting is important to Mississippi voters.

Much like Karahan and Shughart's 2004 article on the Mississippi flag, the issue of gay marriage as a stand-alone issue has clear symbolic connotations. In the same way that the flag vote represented multiple issues to different voters, gay marriage also cut across electoral cleavages in the many referenda that banned it across the US (Camp 2008). This issue was polarizing, as it also involved many different groups for a variety of reasons. The issue of gay marriage is seen as symbolic, as Gaines and Garand show in their 2010 study titled "Morality, Equality, or Locality: Analyzing the Determinants of Support for Same-sex Marriage" (Gaines and Garand 2010). They examined the issue of support for gay marriage, and found that this issue was deeply polarizing, and seen as part of a "culture war", rather than a tangible policy implication, even though to the minority of gay couples in the state, this policy held direct consequences.

This is quite similar to the issues we have explored in the 2001 referendum vote in Mississippi, where it was shown that voters saw the issue of the flag as one of “history” and “Southern culture” rather than one that could potentially alienate social groups. In each of these cases for both African-Americans in 2001, and homosexuals in 2004, Mississippi voters overwhelmingly voted for “their way of life” and these symbolic issues to preserve it, rather than focus on the consequences of the issue itself. Or, as Karahan and Shughart said, this comes from the “expressive” rather than the “instrumental” consequences of the vote. The issue of gay marriage in Mississippi was polarizing, symbolic of greater social feelings of the population, and lacked the potential policy and legal repercussions just like the flag vote. It also is seen by many as a religious issue, which is symbolic of the state’s morality, or adherence to Christian values. This is incredibly important in a region known as the “Bible Belt”, and that Gallup Polls found was the “most religious state” in 2014 (Newport 2014). Thus, it follows the symbolic nature of the 2001 referendum, and supports this hypothesis. Voters in Mississippi saw the vote on gay marriage as a representation of their social values and beliefs, just as they did with the issue of the state flag. Thus, the state voted 6 to 1 to make gay marriage illegal.

However, the issue of gay marriage itself is not similar to the issue of the Mississippi flag in all respects. This issue lacks the historical element of the flag, and replaces it with a “moral” argument from both the conservative and Christian right. While this issue also falls under the umbrella of the Burkean conservatism we have discussed, the outcome may have been much more polarizing even than the flag vote because of this

element. In the “bible belt”, as the region is often called, the issue of morality could potentially be more important to voters than preserving their history.

In many ways, the issue of gay marriage is a clearer example of this form of social conservatism than even the Mississippi flag or the confederate symbol in general. The concept of the legalization of gay marriage directly contradicts accepted social norms, especially within religious contexts, which often dominate Southern political thought. This challenge to the social status quo is seen as especially problematic both from a moral and social standpoint. Thus, it is also similar to the issue of the flag, as the acceptance of gay marriage in the Deep South is seen as being forced upon them. Due to the difference from the status quo and the social nature of the issue, it can clearly be labeled as a problem for the traditional social conservative.

Take for example the most recent developments in 2015 in Mississippi and Alabama. When a federal judge ruled that these bans were unconstitutional, both states fiercely opposed this ruling, and refused to allow same sex marriages to take place. Alabama’s Chief Justice Roy S. Moore even went so far as to order clerks across the state to stop issuing marriage licenses to gay or straight couples in order to prevent any same-sex couples from obtaining a valid license (Reeves 2015). The same issues were seen in Mississippi, as all three branches of the Mississippi government fiercely defied this ruling, and currently are awaiting a Supreme Court ruling to move the issue forward. This issue is not only seen as symbolic to states like Alabama and Mississippi, but it is seen as an attack on the status quo, and an affront to these states’ culture much like the state flag.

Thus, when we examine the example of Amendment 1 on the basis of Burkean conservatism and symbolic voting, we see that there are many similarities to the issue of

the Mississippi flag. Citizens in Mississippi see this issue as demonstrative of their culture, and their values. Where this issue lacks the same historical elements as the issue of the flag, it still more than meets the criteria of traditional conservatism and symbolic voting, and was an even more one-sided outcome among the electorate. This case clearly supports the hypothesis that Mississippians are strongly influenced by these two factors when voting on social issues, and likely voted this way in support of the Mississippi flag.

Initiative 26, the 2011 Personhood amendment:

Initiative 26 was a proposed constitutional amendment to amend the definition of “personhood” in the Mississippi constitution. The initiative proposed to amend the state constitution “to define the word 'person' or 'persons', as those terms are used in Article III of the state constitution, to include every human being from the moment of fertilization, cloning, or the functional equivalent thereof” (Seelye 2011). This measure’s primary motivation was to make abortion completely illegal within the state, but quickly became a much larger issue within the social and political context of the state, and even gained significant national media coverage.

Both previously examined ballot initiatives passed in the state of Mississippi, but Initiative 26 is important in part because it did not pass. The final result was 55 percent voting against and 45 percent in favor of the proposed personhood amendment (Seelye 2011). Abortion-related measures are almost always close, especially in the past decade. Only one amendment similar to the proposed 2011 amendment in Mississippi has ever passed, and it did so in Tennessee in 2014 by a vote of 53 percent to 47 percent (Fish 2014). Other similar initiatives have failed in Colorado (multiple times), North Dakota, South Dakota, Georgia, Oklahoma, and Nevada (Western States Center 2012). The

initiative in Mississippi was the closest vote that did not pass, and this speaks volumes to the strong conservative nature of the electorate in Mississippi. This initiative, just like Amendment 1 before it, would also violate the Supreme Court ruling in *Roe v Wade* (1973), which established a legal right to abortion. This factor, surprisingly enough, is hardly mentioned in both media articles and advocacy literature. Mississippians focused on the concept of abortion itself as a moral issue, and it was one that citizens quickly rallied behind.

As with Amendment 1, this ballot initiative can be examined as a symbolic vote, and as a mobilizing issue for those with traditional social conservative beliefs. First, the issue of abortion is another example of a religious issue that is seen as a symbol for morality and Christian values by voters Hubert Hoover, a cabinetmaker and construction worker, who voted for the amendment in 2011, said in an expressive quotation "I figure you can't be half for something, so if you're against abortion you should be for this. You've either got to be wholly for something or wholly against it" (Pettus 2011). "I view it as transformative," said Brad Prewitt, a lawyer and executive director of the Yes on 26 campaign, which is so named in support of the Mississippi proposition. Yet another proponent stated "Personhood is bigger than just shutting abortion clinics; it's an opportunity for people to say that we're made in the image of God" (Eckholm 2011). This language makes specific mention of the demonstrative potential of this issue, and shows this vote was meant by its proponents to represent broader, more complex issues than abortion alone. This directly relates to Womack's analysis of symbols as "representations of broader, more complex issues" (Womack 2005).

Mississippians once again saw this issue as representative of many broader issues such as religion, morality, and acceptance of non-Southern political positions like abortion, which has historically been more accepted in non-Southern and Midwestern states. This is similar to observations on gay marriage and the preservation of the state flag, which both also were seen as representative of broader issues. As Rosman, Rubel, and Weisgrau's book tells us, "People's identity or concept of self as members of a group is powerfully bound up with such symbols" (Rosman, Rubel, & Weisgrau 93). In this case, membership in these religious groups that so strongly oppose abortion may have led to stronger connections and advocacy for this topic, as it did with the issue of gay marriage. Each of these cases further expand on this concept, showing that there are many issues that can be seen as "symbolic" to voters, especially when put to a vote.

However, this vote was different than the previous two examples, as many voters and opponents saw this issue as one of policy and health implications, rather than as purely symbolic. An exit poll published by personhoodusa.com stated that two of the primary reasons voters ultimately opposed this initiative were indeed far more tangible than symbolic. In fact, this poll said that 31% of those polled that voted "No" on Initiative 26 said they thought the initiative would ban in vitro fertilization, and 28% said that they believed mothers would be denied life-saving treatment in cases of potentially fatal pregnancy. Similarly, 8% believed all forms of birth control would become illegal, and another 8% believed there would be no exceptions in cases of rape or incest (Personhood USA). Figure 4.1 below is from the aforementioned article from Personhood USA.

"No" Votes on Mississippi Amendment 26

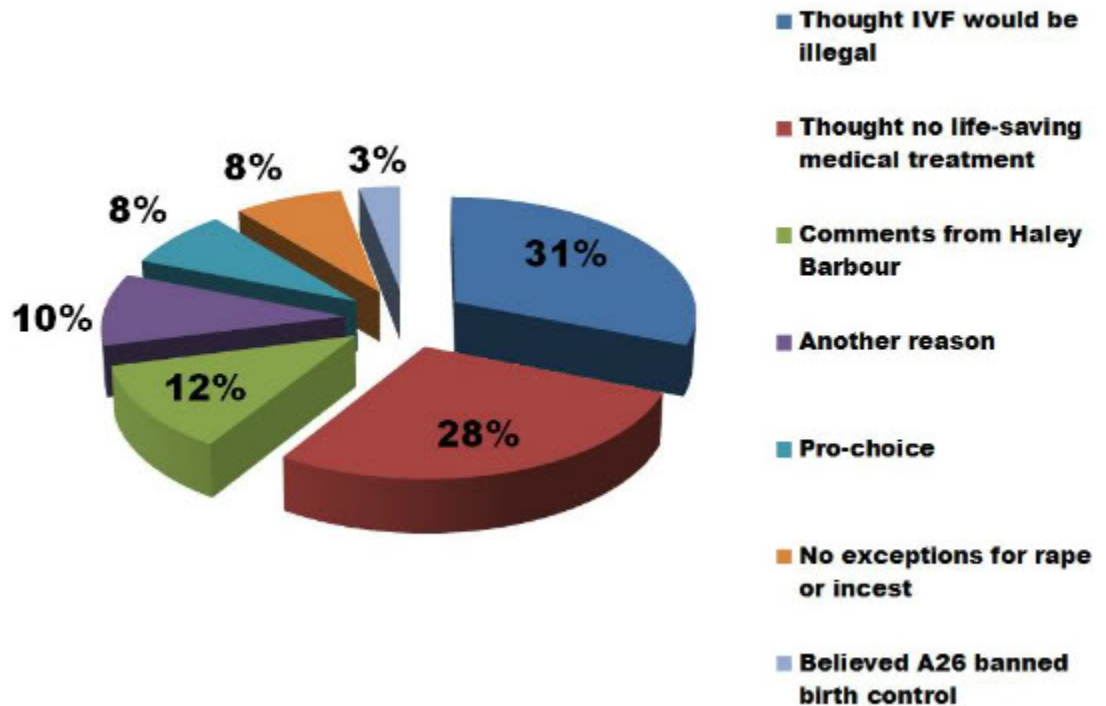


Figure 4.1 (Personhood USA)

This total percentage of individuals who cited specific policy implications of amending the definition of “personhood” in the state is a whopping 75%, if this poll is credible. However, this exit poll is potentially unreliable as a sample of the voting population given the clear lack of information about sample size, demographics, question construction, or funding. On the other hand, the issues it addresses are clearly not symbolic, as they could be potentially life altering both for family life and personal health. While it is unclear to this day if these claims about in vitro fertilization and potentially fatal pregnancies would have been true, these were the motivating issues for voters at the time, which is what this study is most interested in. Luckily, nearly all articles discussing this issue provide evidence that shows these sentiments about tangible

consequences of the personhood were clearly present, even if not at the level that the personhoodusa.org posted exit poll claims. Both the aforementioned Huffington Post and New York Times articles, along with others, cite many of these same concerns from opponents of the initiative.

But what does this mean for this example within the context of this study? In fact, this more policy-oriented element to this vote may help explain why it failed, and the other more symbolic measures passed. If voters in Mississippi believed that Initiative 26 was not going to affect their health or personal family lives, they might have passed it, just as Tennessee did. Amendment 1 was not relevant to most Mississippians personal lives, so they were able to ignore potential policy implications for homosexual couples. However, in the case of personhood, the opposition was able to alter perceptions throughout the state enough to make the vote seem instrumental rather than symbolic to many voters due to these concerns about a variety of issues. Many Mississippians likely still saw this vote as symbolic, as part of their identity as Christians or pro-life individuals, which could explain why the vote was so close. Perhaps the measure was too extreme, and a ban on abortions instead of a personhood amendment might have passed more easily. It is also possible that the campaigns of opponents were particularly well funded or effective. Ultimately in this case, the failure of this measure to pass also supports the hypothesis that Mississippians are strongly influenced by the symbolic nature of ballot initiatives on social issues.

Next, analysis of Initiative 26 as a traditional social conservative issue must be conducted. Once again the issue of abortion and personhood cannot be directly related to the concept of historical preservation, like the example of the Mississippi Flag. But once

again, many elements of traditional social conservatism, such as the protection of the “behavioral immune system” of religious individuals manifest themselves in this issue. Unfortunately, abortion is more complicated than the issue of gay marriage or the state flag, as the status quo is different in this case. Passage of Initiative 26 would technically constitute change in Mississippi, as abortion clinics have been legal in the state for a long time.

However, this concept of “aversion to social change” instead of merely the modern definition of “social conservatism” which aligns closely with the views of the Republican Party become muddled in this example. This ambiguity is resolved through an article titled “The Abortion Controversy: Conflicting Beliefs and Values in American Society”, which firmly demonstrates that the issue of abortion is clearly a “social conflict”, and found that “social traditionalism is also related to pro-life views” (Tamney, Johnson and Burton 1992). Thus, even though the status quo is legal abortion, the traditional social conservative viewpoint supports pro-life movements. Again, this is seemingly problematic for this study, as this measure failed in Mississippi, though by a small margin. The same argument applies for traditional social conservatism as for symbolic voting: this particular case was different.

In this case, understanding broader attitudes and ideas about abortion in the United States will help determine how to approach this problem. Abortion is an issue that, while currently legal, is still just as controversial in 2015 as it was in 1973. Unfortunately, polling agencies conduct nationwide opinion polls without individual state data, but this broader data demonstrates just how divided Americans are on the issue of Abortion. Since 1996, the percentage of Americans identifying as either “pro-life” or pro-

choice” has never been more than 9 points apart. In July of 2011, they even found that opinions were evenly split, with 47% identifying as both pro-life and pro-choice. Gallup Polls even included a question to all Americans in some of its older polling on abortion attitudes, as seen below in figure 5.1. Even in 2005, Americans clearly did not support constitutional bans on abortion.

American views on Abortion over time

“Do you favor a constitutional amendment to ban abortion in all circumstances, except when necessary to save the life of the mother?”

	<u>Favor</u>	<u>Oppose</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
	%	%	%
2005 Nov 11-13	37	61	2
2003 Jan 10-12	38	59	3
1996 Jul 25-28	38	59	3
1992 Jan 16-19	42	56	2
1984	50	46	4

Figure 5.1 (Gallup 2015)

This data shows that this issue is hotly contested across the country, and that Mississippians as they voted in 2011 are not far from the national averages, if we consider votes for the personhood amendment to be directly related to a person’s identification as pro-life or pro-choice. However, the presence of instrumental consequences in this vote, along with strong religious movements tell a different story. Mississippi’s personhood amendment gave voters other instrumental consequences to worry about, and thus greater opposition than either the 2001 flag vote or the 2004 ban on gay marriage occurred. However, the presence of religious groups created a strong

opposition, and thus Mississippi's results were much closer than all other states except Tennessee.

Given what is known of the results of Initiative 26, traditional social conservatism and symbolic voting seem to have played a role in making the vote closer than most other states, though the radical nature of the vote created instrumental consequences which could not be overcome. Thus, this example also supports the importance of these two factors in Mississippi ballot initiatives. While there were mild variations in outcome, influential factors, and religious influence, these three cases all provide evidence that supports the claim that the 2001 referendum was strongly influenced by these two factors.

Discussion

While this paper argues that the decision to keep the flag may not have necessarily been a correct one, it does shed some light on the issue's relevance both inside and outside the state of Mississippi. The flag has a long and complex history, full of both historical and racial meaning. Analysis of this symbol must take both of these meanings into account when examining how voters acted and felt, rather than merely examining the repercussions of the outcome itself. After examining the values of traditional social conservatism and reactions to symbolic votes in the state of Mississippi, there is clearly merit to the notion that keeping the 1894 flag may have socially conservative roots outside of racism and white racial attitudes. This helps to explain some of the results that racism alone cannot, while expanding upon previous knowledge of Mississippi's political culture and provides future lessons to campaigns and politicians seeking to influence Mississippi voters on controversial social issues.

Bigotry cannot be eradicated. White racism in the south is nowhere near reaching its conclusion. There will always be Mississippi secessionists who plaster the Confederate battle flag on every article of clothing, bumper, and flagpole they own. Students at Ole Miss will continue to shout “The South will rise again!” and “Hoddy Toddy”, neither of which makes much sense. Ultimately there is more to the state of Mississippi than these individuals and their views, and more to the 2001 referendum than the opinions of these individuals.

Mississippi is a diverse state with many different attitudes about the issue of the state’s affinity for its confederate roots. The state flag of Mississippi is almost certainly a problematic symbol and needs to be removed sooner rather than later for the state to move forward in the eyes of the nation. The fact is, Mississippians chose to retain this symbol and have yet to remove it, and this paper has proven that the political culture of the state and the nature of the vote played a significant role in this modern political anomaly. Hopefully, Mississippians may one day see the divisive and racial realities of the symbol they so desperately cling to, and evaluate it accordingly. In the meantime, analysis and reflection on the 2001 referendum is seen as an opportunity to understand many of the other political and social realities that are present in the state and affect political outcomes.

Chapter 5: Limitations and Areas for Future Analysis

This study, while important in beginning to explore the issue of the Mississippi flag and voter attitudes about symbolic social issues, is just that: a beginning. As an undergraduate honors thesis, many of the materials and resources that more experienced researchers might have used were unavailable, and the amount of time for this research

was limited. Due to these limitations, this study focused on producing a manageable piece of introductory research. This research begins to lay the groundwork in this area, specifically in current research on the issue of the Mississippi flag, as the majority of the literature on the flag is over 10 years old.

More specifically, this study could benefit strongly from primary poll data of Mississippi voters, to learn if there is correlation between traditional conservatism and symbolic voting and support for the Mississippi flag. This research would need to reach a somewhat representative sample of the population, and use some form of modified scale to measure these variables. Unfortunately, a search for a model that is either current or accurately identifies and measures these concepts yielded no such instrument. This would help to reduce much of the speculation about "voter attitudes" on these complex issues, and see if these voters really do feel strongly about the issues mentioned throughout this paper.

Also, many of the issues mentioned are also incomplete. Many more variables need to be examined in order to definitively claim that these voters cared about issues like "traditional social conservatism" or "symbolic voting" at all, rather than some other factor which better explains their voting patterns. This was difficult to incorporate into this research, as it would significantly expand the study. However, the primary issues mentioned in the previous literature, racism and white racial attitudes, were mentioned throughout the paper in order to recognize this limitation. As mentioned, these factors may be good indicators, or even better indicators in some instances, of support for the Mississippi Flag in particular. However, this study seeks to understand if other factors

throughout the state of Mississippi also played a role, in order to seek to explain a wider array of attitudes rather than group an entire state into one explanation.

Another limitation this study faced is the lack of concrete examples or data to examine in regard to Amendment 1 in 2004 and Initiative 26 in 2011. Neither of these cases has been significantly researched and peer reviewed specifically, and even on a journalistic level, resources are scarce. This caused some of the analysis on these issues to come from broader examples that relate to other cases, rather than specific examples, polls, or data from the votes on these specific issues. This could be solved with more concrete primary data on these issues, which again was not possible at this level of undergraduate research, as data needs to be representative of the state rather than youth or college populations.

Another major limitation was the different dates and circumstances with which each case came about. In a 10-year period, political cultures and attitudes toward social opinions can change significantly. This study does not take these potential changes into account, but rather focuses primarily on the concepts addresses in each instance rather than the full temporal breadth of each ballot initiative. Again, this is not only difficult, but time consuming for an undergraduate study.

Finally, future research can focus on a few specific areas in order to further add to the body of academic work on this topic. As mentioned, the most likely form of research on this specific research question is a survey to measure attitudes in Mississippi toward the flag and compare it to these other measures. However, studies could also focus on Mississippi political structures and political action that has kept the flag in place at the governmental level, as this has also played a strong role in its resilience. Yet another

future area of research is the effectiveness of campaigns for reform in the state of Mississippi, and how to overcome the opposition to social change that these campaigns faced on issues like same sex marriage and the Mississippi flag. This could be important if primary data showed, for example, that the state held negative views of the current flag, and reform was needed. These are clear political challenges in the state, and further research into these areas would help to provide a more complete understanding of this topic.

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