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Troubled Past, Golden Opportunity: Public Memory and Memorialization at the University of Southern Mississippi

Hannah E. Arnold

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Troubled Past, Golden Opportunity: Public Memory and Memorialization at the
University of Southern Mississippi

by

Hannah E. Arnold

A Thesis
Submitted to the Honors College of
The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment
of Honors Requirements

May 2023

Approved by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'KG' with a large, sweeping underline.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that The University of Southern Mississippi (USM) consciously chooses to present historical narratives in its history in ways that best enhance the university's image. Examining the narratives of M.M. Roberts and Oseola McCarty using the theoretical frameworks of public memory and collective memory study reveals that the way they are memorialized within university history include both conscious and subconscious silences that impact how they are remembered by the public.

This thesis identifies gaps within these two historical narratives and shows how these gaps were influenced by factors designed to enhance the university's public image. Overall, the public memory framework that is used in this work can be applied to the examination of historical narratives at other universities in the South and can enhance conversations surrounding the preservation and exposition of historical narratives that advance uncomfortable histories linked to white supremacy, racism, and discrimination on these campuses. Overall, this thesis challenges current interpretations of USM history and advocates for deep investigations that incorporate public memory analysis.

Keywords: The University of Southern Mississippi, public memory, race, university history, Oseola McCarty, M.M. Roberts

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my family, mom, dad, and brother. You all love, support, and encourage me in everything that I do, and words cannot describe how thankful I am for y'all. Mom and Dad, thank y'all for providing me with the opportunity to go to college. I will forever be grateful for your endless sacrifices for our family.

I would also like to dedicate this thesis to the University of Southern Mississippi and every person that I have met over the last four years. Never in a million years did I think that I would fall in love with a community so much, and I cannot imagine my life without my Southern Miss experience.

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My deepest thanks go to Dr. Kevin Greene, whose tireless efforts as thesis advisor, professor, and mentor can neither be adequately put into words nor fully repaid. Thank you for opening doors that I never knew existed and thank you for challenging me to remain intellectually curious.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

MNC	Mississippi Normal College
MSC	Mississippi Southern College
USM	the University of Southern Mississippi

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

On September 25, 1976, 33,000 packed the newly built M.M. Roberts Stadium on the campus of the University of Southern Mississippi (USM) to watch the Golden Eagles take on the Ole Miss Rebels. This day came almost three years after the Golden Eagles last played in front of their home crowd during the 1973 football season, and the stadium underwent a 6.3 billion dollar renovation that saw new aluminum bleacher seats, an improved field lighting system, new concession stands on the East End, and an on-field storm drainage system.¹ The project to update the stadium began in April 1974 with a ribbon cutting ceremony and took two and a half years to complete. During the renovation period, over 18,500 cubic yards of concrete was poured, and 1,600 tons of steel was used to build the largest public space on campus.² When asked about the importance of finally playing a game in front of a home crowd and in the new stadium, head coach Bobby Collins stated, “Only a few of our current players have ever played a game on our campus, and I know having the splendid new facility will mean a lot to our program.”³ In their first game playing at M.M. Roberts Stadium, the Golden Eagles, led by storied head coach Bobby Collins, were shutout by the Rebels 28-0. By scoring a touchdown in every quarter of the game, the Rebels successfully spoiled Coach Collins’ first game coaching in Hattiesburg and the new stadium’s grand opening.⁴ The shutout

¹ Janet Braswell, “It Took Time, Concrete, Steel, but It’s Finished,” *Hattiesburg American*, September 24, 1976, 22.

² Braswell, “It Took Time, Concrete, Steel, but It’s Finished,” 22.

³ Rick Cleveland, “Home Games, SEC Foes, Highlight Southern’s 1976 Football Schedule,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 9, 1976.

⁴ Rick Cleveland, “Rebels Play Spoilers, Tounce Eagles, 28-0,” *Hattiesburg American*, September 25, 1976, 25.

loss in front of a sold-out crowd was the third straight loss in a season where the Golden Eagles only won two games.

Although the game played on the field lacked any excitement on its own accord, the grand opening and dedication of M.M. Roberts Stadium brought energy and life to Golden Eagle fans, Southern Miss supporters, and the Hattiesburg community. In a pregame ceremony, Malcolm Mette (M.M.) Roberts took the field with USM President Aubrey K. Lucas and Governor Cliff Finch to be recognized during the official dedication of the stadium as “M.M. Roberts Stadium.”⁵ In the stadium stands, some of Roberts’ longtime friends including Senators James O. Eastland and John C. Stennis, and U.S. Southern District Judges Dan Russell and Walter Nixon, and U.S. Representative Trent Lott, looked on as their colleague was officially memorialized within Southern Miss history with the dedication of the new stadium.⁶ Roberts, a Hattiesburg native and two-time USM graduate, was known as a successful practicing attorney in his community and for his twelve years as a trustee and two-year term as the president on the State College Board, the overseeing governing body of the higher education institutions in Mississippi.

Apart from his service to the college board, Roberts cared deeply about the University of Southern Mississippi and worked tirelessly throughout his term to ensure that the university received the support that it deserved from the state government. For example, Roberts played on the 1916 Mississippi Normal College football team as an

⁵ Chester A. Morgan, *Treasured Past, Golden Future: The Centennial History of the University of Southern Mississippi* (University Press of Mississippi, The University of Southern Mississippi, 2010), 124.

⁶ Brenda Morgan, “Roberts Recalls Southern from Days on Team of ‘16,” *Hattiesburg American*, September 24, 1976, 28.

undergraduate student in a season where the team had to play at the nearby Kamper Park.⁷ After all, Dr. William McCain, university president from 1955 to 1975, had recommended to the State College Board that the new stadium be named in Roberts' honor, suggesting that Roberts was instrumental in helping then Mississippi Southern College (MSC) obtain university status to become the University of Southern Mississippi in 1962.⁸ When asked about Roberts' and his role in moving the university forward, McCain stated, "Dr. Roberts has been largely responsible for this University's receiving its share of funds appropriated by the legislature. He is one the strongest supporters of USM, that exists anywhere."⁹ Nevertheless, Roberts never pushed to have his name memorialized at USM and thought that he was not worthy of the honor.¹⁰ He even felt that the only reason why the college board endorsed the recommendation to name the stadium after him was because they were his friends and colleagues.¹¹ Despite not being directly involved in the university at the time of his memorialization through the football stadium, Roberts still supported the football team and other university athletic teams and had not missed a commencement ceremony since 1926. To him, USM played an instrumental role in his life, and having his legacy cemented in university history was the capstone of his storied life and career in law and education.

Though the media and university publications viewed the dedication of M.M. Roberts Stadium as a well-deserved opportunity to memorialize an honorable member of the university and Hattiesburg community, Black citizens in Mississippi saw this move

⁷ Morgan, "Roberts Recalls Southern from Days on Team of '16."

⁸ Morgan, "Roberts Recalls Southern from Days on Team of '16,"

⁹ "To Dr. M.M. Roberts, USM Stadium Dedicated." *The Magee Courier*, May 22, 1975, 1.

¹⁰ Morgan, "Roberts Recalls Southern from Days on Team of '16"

¹¹ Morgan, "Roberts Recalls Southern from Days on Team of '16."

by the State College Board and university as a conscious decision to solidify Roberts' name and legacy in the public memory of the university and Mississippi higher education. Black Mississippians, then, viewed Roberts and the dedication of a new stadium from a different perspective. In an editorial published in *The Delta-Democrat Times*, a newspaper from Greenville, Mississippi, the author called the move to name the stadium after Roberts, "the worst insult to the black citizens in our state and to a great many whites."¹² Though the effort to memorialize Roberts was justified by what university leadership and college board trustees celebrated as successful leadership and a dedication to advancing higher education in Mississippi, the editorial asserted that his involvement with the board was filled with "instances of demonstrated bigotry, racism, and total disdain for academic freedom."¹³ To Black Mississippians, Roberts represented a "symbol of a dark era in our state's history we need to forget," The state did not need "to honor him now in a public facility where black athletes will perform and black citizens will come as spectators."¹⁴ Despite this perspective and the looming messages of hatred and racism that could have clouded his legacy, to this day, M.M. Roberts Stadium continues to attract hundreds of thousands of visitors to USM's campus, and the full legacy of the life of M.M. Roberts continues to be masked by the more favorable narrative for the university.

Nineteen years after the dedication of M.M. Roberts Stadium in 1976, Ms. Oseola McCarty left a meeting with Mr. Paul Laughlin, her financial advisor through Trustmark Bank, having just signed a revocable trust agreement with the University of Southern

¹² "This Particular Honor Is More of an Insult," *The Delta Democrat Times*, May 19, 1975, 4.

¹³ "This Particular Honor Is More of an Insult," 4.

¹⁴ "This Particular Honor Is More of an Insult," 4.

Mississippi worth around \$150,000 dollars.¹⁵ McCarty, an eighty-six year old black washerwoman who had spent the majority of her life washing and ironing clothes for members of the Hattiesburg community, had retired the previous December due to painful arthritis in her hands.¹⁶ After spending her career saving most of the money she made from her work and living a modest and sustainable lifestyle, McCarty decided to use her savings to help students at USM afford the opportunity to go to college and receive an education, an opportunity that she did not have. Soon after she gave her life savings to USM, the story of her hard work and generosity spread to members of both the university and Hattiesburg communities. As soon as USM President Aubrey K. Lucas learned of McCarty's gift to the USM Foundation, he invited her to dinner at his house, and within a week, McCarty had gone from being an anonymous African American woman living in the heart of Hattiesburg to a national celebrity.¹⁷

Before McCarty could even pause to understand the magnitude of her contributions to USM, her story was featured in every major newspaper and media outlet across the country. People who learned of her story sent letters thanking her for the positive differences that she had made in both her community and the country. To many, her story showed that there were still good people in the world. In one letter to McCarty, Nianza Halbritter from California wrote, "we hear so often in the papers of the mean way

¹⁵ Chester A. Morgan, *Treasured Past, Golden Future: The Centennial History of the University of Southern Mississippi*, 196.

¹⁶ Shana Walton, Oral history with Miss Oseola McCarty, February 22, 1996, the University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage, 1.

¹⁷ Hannah Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty, 2022.

that we human beings behave toward one another. It is good for us to read about a life lived from the heart.”¹⁸

As her story caught fire and spread across the country, McCarty received awards such as the Presidential Citizens Medal, the second highest award given to a U.S. citizen, and the Avicenna Medal for educational commitment from the United States.¹⁹ Because of the public media’s persistence in getting the news of McCarty’s story to as many news outlets as possible, the single story of her gift to the university was the only narrative that spread. Ultimately, this left room for the public to interpret the rest of McCarty’s narrative through their own respective spheres of influence. In the span of a few short months, McCarty went from spending her afternoons sitting on the front porch of her house in downtown Hattiesburg watching the children in her neighborhood walk home from school, to traveling the country alongside USM public relations representatives to various speaking events, media appearances, and awards ceremonies.

Today, McCarty is not only remembered by the USM and Hattiesburg communities for giving her life’s earnings to the university to help students who looked like her afford the educational opportunities that she lacked, but she is also remembered by stakeholders in the university community for shining the spotlight on USM as a gritty, mid-major research institution in the American South. Though her generosity shows that anyone can use the resources and skills that they are blessed with to spread joy to others, she is remembered by how the public perceived her contributions to the university. Proof

¹⁸ Correspondence between Nianza Halbritter and Oseola McCarty, August 1995, M442, Box 2, Folder 4, Oseola McCarty Collection, Historical Manuscripts, Special Collections, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries

¹⁹ Southern Miss Alumni Association, *The Drawl: The History and Traditions Handbook of The University of Southern Mississippi*, 68.

of this lies in the way that she is memorialized on campus and within USM history. A statute of McCarty was erected in the center of campus in 2020 to remember her impact to the university. In addition, each year the Office of Undergraduate Scholarships hosts a weeklong celebration in March to celebrate McCarty's birthday and share the impact of her donation to the university. Overall, even though McCarty never attended USM as a student and did not visit campus until after her donation, she is remembered in USM history as an inspiration to all.

While both Roberts and McCarty are remembered for their contributions to enhancing the university community, their narratives are presented in ways that are most beneficial to the university's overall public image. Examining the full historical narratives of M.M. Roberts and Oseola McCarty using the theoretical frameworks of public memory and collective memory reveals that each of their presentations and memorialization within university history include both conscious and subconscious silences that impact how they are remembered by the public.

Secondary source analysis of the intersection between public memory and the production of historical narratives at American universities reveals that these institutions create unspoken, yet powerful socioeconomic contracts with people whether they have strong connections to the institution or not.²⁰ Whether it is to the prospective student that recently completed an interest form or to the third-generation student and his or her family, institutions of higher learning are continuously striving to create and sustain a thriving middle class within the university community that enhances the campus culture

²⁰ Philo A. Hutcheson, *A People's History of American Higher Education*, (Routledge Press, New York City, New York, 2020), 8.

while also satisfying the interests and traditions of the socioeconomic upper class.²¹ This tension, particularly in newer, mid-size universities, presents itself in the creation of a university culture and historical memory that produces a spirit and memory that compels people to buy into the mission and values of the institution. However, the creation of a historical memory that aligns with targeted local, state, and national constituents often contradicts the silenced aspects of the university's narrative.

While studies of universities in the South such as the University of Georgia and the University of Alabama detail the hidden influences of white supremacy and discrimination within university history, rhetoric, marketing strategies and traditions, these studies fail to identify the significance of the way that university communities are influenced by factors outside of the institution. Additionally, though university publications give in-depth accounts of USM history, there has not been a study that examines the intersection of memory, university history, and memorialization at the University of Southern Mississippi. This thesis identifies gaps within these two historical narratives and shows how these gaps were influenced by factors designed to enhance the university's image. Overall, the public memory framework that is used in this work can be applied to the examination of historical narratives at other universities in the South and can enhance conversations surrounding the preservation and exposition of historical narratives that advance uncomfortable histories linked to white supremacy, racism, and discrimination on these campuses.

M.M. Roberts is remembered within USM's historical narrative as a successful advocate for USM as an institution of higher education. However, he is not remembered

²¹ Hutcheson, *A People's History of American Higher Education*, 9.

as a staunch segregationist who used his racist perspectives both in his law career to influence critical voting rights discrimination cases in Hattiesburg and in his term on the State College Board of Trustees to preserve Mississippi higher education as an institution for only white citizens. In the same way, Oseola McCarty is remembered in Southern Miss history as a generous benefactor to the university who worked washing clothes in Hattiesburg to give back to the institution. However, she is not remembered as being a quiet and humble black woman living during the climax of the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi. Her chance to obtain an education was taken from her when she was forced to care for sick family members and her lifelong career as a washerwoman was one of the few occupations that was available to her as a black woman.

USM's effort to silence these parts of both Roberts and McCarty's narratives and emphasize more favorable threads of their stories demonstrates that colleges and universities are internally motivated to preserve the parts of their history within public memory that are appealing to the public and university stakeholders such as alumni, donors, and college board trustees. At the same time, popular media and governmental institutions also shape the way that Roberts and McCarty are memorialized within USM history. In Oseola McCarty's narrative, the USM administration and Foundation capitalized on the attention that her story received from media and used this to showcase USM as a welcoming university that valued the diversity of the student body. As a result, McCarty's legacy is influenced by the public media that put her and the university at the forefront of the national memory. In M.M. Roberts' narrative, the Mississippi state government during the 1960s and 1970s utilized its power and influence of the State College Board to solidify the memorialization of Roberts in the USM historical narrative

through the naming of the football stadium. Because USM is a public university, it can be considered in many ways an extension of the values and goals of the state government. Roberts' legacy, therefore, can be attributed to the state government's conscious desire to advance its messages of exclusion and white supremacy within the higher education system.

Because universities are social institutions that cater to the needs of a wide variety of groups and have a chief purpose of improving the life experiences of those that choose to invest in a college education, they are also public spaces where the right to gain and control power and influence within the university community are open to being controlled and contested depending on the climate of the public sphere.²² Universities operate as institutions that create landscapes shaped by the memories and priorities of diverse groups of people. These competing groups and individuals engage in the exchange of historical narratives and memories within the sphere of the campus community, and often the exchange between groups and institutions reinforce inequalities that exist within social and political spheres.²³ Ultimately, in these environments privileged groups control the dominant narrative and these perpetuate the exclusionary properties of an institution's past.²⁴ As a result, universities fight to create a balance between a sense of belonging for groups of people—including minority student groups—with the voices of influential social, political, or financial interest groups who have keen

²² Jordan Brasher, Joshua F. J. Inwood, and Derek H. Alderman, "Applying Critical Race and Memory Studies to University Place Naming Controversies: Toward a Responsible Landscape Policy," *Papers in Applied Geography* 3, no. 3-4, (October 2017): 292-307, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23754931.2017.1369892>, 300.

²³ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Belknap Press: Harvard University, 1995), 6.

²⁴ Brundage, *The Southern Past*, 6.

interests in advancing a university or campus narrative that is neither progressive nor interested in revising narratives veiled in hate, racism, or exclusion.²⁵

When universities uphold narratives within their history that applaud messages of hatred and discrimination and commemorate these ideals through the naming of buildings, monuments, and inclusion in official university publications, they promote exclusionary messages and that both harm the campus community and create division between interest groups.²⁶ To combat these effects, universities highlight narratives within their history that promote thoughts and feelings of diversity, inclusivity, and belonging for all students while choosing to silence narratives that would negate these ideals. This is most seen in predominately white institutions in the South as these colleges and universities work to confront controversial elements of their founding and history especially during the Civil Rights Movement era. USM was founded in 1910 as one of the only teachers' colleges in the state of Mississippi and was not integrated until 1965 when Gwendolyn Armstrong and Raylawni Branch became the first African American students to attend the university. This success came almost a decade after Clyde Kennard was denied admission to Mississippi Southern College (MSC) on three separate occasions between 1955, 1958, and 1959.²⁷

Despite these attempts by universities to create inclusive spaces within their campus communities by silencing narratives within their history, college campuses in the

²⁵ Jordan Brasher, Joshua F. J. Inwood, and Derek H. Alderman, "Applying Critical Race and Memory Studies to University Place Naming Controversies, 292.

²⁶ Brasher, Inwood, and Alderman, "Applying Critical Race and Memory Studies to University Place Naming Controversies, 293.

²⁷ Southern Miss Alumni Association, *The Drawl: The History and Traditions Handbook of The University of Southern Mississippi*, 34.

American South are often complicit in subconsciously empowering uncomfortable narratives of exclusion, discrimination, and white supremacy in an effort to satisfy financial benefactors, grow enrollment numbers, and create social order within the student life of the university.²⁸ They do so by cementing surface-level narratives of people or historical moments through memorials and keeping these memorials central in the greater university narrative. At USM, Roberts and McCarty are memorialized in different ways that include the naming of the football stadium after Roberts and the installation of a statue in the heart of campus for McCarty. USM's official website includes a page highlighting the institution's efforts and initiatives to create a diverse and versatile college experience for students and an inclusive work environment for employees. This page states that, "USM is proud to be the most diverse university in the state of Mississippi."²⁹ Additionally, official university histories such as Chester A. Morgan's *Treasured Past, Golden Future: The Centennial History of the University of Southern Mississippi*, and university traditions handbooks such as *The Drawl*, advance these narratives by including sections detailing African American history and inclusion efforts at the university.

This research uses a wide primary source base of oral histories, personal correspondence, and newspaper articles to balance the narratives of Roberts and McCarty against the way they are presented in university publications and media. This work analyzes the legacies of Oseola McCarty and M.M. Roberts within the framework of

²⁸ Brasher, Inwood, Alderman, "Applying Critical Race and Memory Studies to University Place Naming Controversies: Toward a Responsible Landscape Policy," 293.

²⁹ "Diversity and Inclusion," *The University of Southern Mississippi*, <https://www.usm.edu/diversity-inclusion/index.php>.

university public to give a holistic evaluation of the way that official USM publications present these narratives to the public and university community. This thesis examines both the internal and external influences shaping the historical production of these narratives within USM's history. Additionally, this study shows how these factors work together to shape the way these people are memorialized by Southern Miss. Southern Miss's presentations of historical narratives has minimized aspects of public memory that could negatively impact the university's image, a common practice utilized by institutions as they attempt to control their public brand. By examining the ways USM as an institution has controlled the public memory of Oseola McCarty and M.M. Roberts, this thesis posits that the production of historical memory within Southern Miss's history is a representation of the exertion of power within the university community. This practice in the public sphere shapes the way that narratives within the university are cemented in public memory.³⁰

Chapter II of this work examines the historical narrative of M.M. Roberts from his early life and professional career to his legacy on campus. Chapter III details the life and legacy of Oseola McCarty within USM history and analyzes the impact of public media on shaping her memorialization on campus. This work concludes by providing a forecast for the future of memorialization at USM and other universities in the American South.

Although, historiography examining the memorialization of aspects of white Southern heritage and the commemoration of white supremacy and discrimination through monuments and the naming of buildings in the public sphere often calls for the

³⁰ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory*, 6.

removal of these memorials or the altering of the narrative, this research does not utilize the same perspective. Rather, this work provides a detailed account of the legacies of Roberts and McCarty to demonstrate two different ways that USM chose to memorialize these narratives within the institutional history and public memory. Overall, this work contributes to historiography that details the production of university history by providing a new frame of reference for examining memorialization and public memory on university campuses.

CHAPTER II: M.M. ROBERTS AND A “GOLDEN” PAST

On May 13, 1961, Joe T. Patterson, the Attorney General for the State of Mississippi, received a letter from Burke Marshall, the Assistant Attorney General for the newly created Civil Right Division of the United States Department of Justice, regarding the investigation of discriminatory voter registration practices taking place inside the Forrest County Circuit Clerk's Office in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.³¹ Marshall wrote, “In Forrest County there are approximately 25 Negroes registered out of a voting age Negro population of approximately 7,500 persons. It is our information that over 50 percent of the about 22,500 white citizens of voting age are registered.”³² Marshall requested that he be notified by Patterson in the event that these voting registration matters could be settled by local actions of following the correct voting eligibility standards when registering black citizens to avoid a federal lawsuit.³³ Theron C. Lynd, the Forrest County Circuit Clerk and county voting registrar was aware of the possibility of a lawsuit. He was advised by his already assembled litigation defense team of Dugas Shands, Francis Zachary, and M.M. Roberts to refuse to disclose voter registration records to the Civil Rights Division until the team was able to request an extension on the request, gather the necessary evidence, and craft a defense argument for the perceived court case.³⁴

³¹ Correspondence between Joe T. Patterson and Burke Marshall, 13 May 1961, M27, Box 11, Folder 21, U.S v. Theron C. Lynd- Legal Case Historical Manuscripts, Special Collections, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries.

³² Correspondence between Joe T. Patterson and Burke Marshall, 13 May 1961, M27, Box 11, Folder 21, U.S v. Theron C. Lynd- Legal Case Historical Manuscripts, Special Collections, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries.

³³ Correspondence between Joe T. Patterson and Burke Marshall, 13 May 1961, M27, Box 11, Folder 21, U.S v. Theron C. Lynd- Legal Case Historical Manuscripts, Special Collections, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries.

³⁴ Sturkey, *Hattiesburg*, 279.

His litigation defense team consisted of Dugas Shands, Francis Zachary, and M.M. Roberts. Shands served as an assistant attorney general for Mississippi since 1954 when he was appointed by past attorney general J.P. Coleman. Shands was then chosen to head the state's civil rights defense team, the Mississippi Civil Rights Division, by attorney general Joe T. Patterson.³⁵ Shands, a Mississippian born in Panola County, was known to be an openly staunch racist. For instance, a local Jackson reporter wrote: "[a] white-haired, slow-speaking lawyer stands between Mississippi and racial integration."³⁶ Shands' extreme dedication to protecting the sovereignty of the state of Mississippi and to preserving white supremacy went to great lengths. Once, when preparing for a case defense regarding transportation segregation policies, he worked himself to complete exhaustion and had to be hospitalized.³⁷ Francis Zachary, on the other hand, was a younger and quieter lawyer on Lynd's defense team. Zachary served primarily as Roberts' co-counsel in the case and was Lynd's personal attorney and handled all personal matters for Lynd and his family.³⁸ While Roberts and Shands embraced the opportunity to handle the more controversial elements of the trial, Zachary was not a fan of nasty confrontations. Rather, he often made himself available for Lynd on a personal level and allowed Roberts and Shands to "wield the sword," of the trial.³⁹ Not only did each of these Mississippi lawyers possessed unique talents and personalities that would enhance their defense team dynamic, but they also each held deep segregationist beliefs

³⁵ Bob Pittman, "Capitolizations: Shands Stands Between State and Integration," *Clarion Ledger*, August 13, 1961, 19.

³⁶ Pittman, "Capitolizations," 19.

³⁷ Pittman, "Capitolizations," 19.

³⁸ Martin Jr., *Count Them One By One: Black Mississippians Fighting for the Right to Vote*, (University of Mississippi Press, 2019), 85.

³⁹ Martin Jr., *Count Them One By One*, 85.

and were committed to preserving racial order and state sovereignty in Mississippi. After all, Lynd, a member of the Hattiesburg White Citizens' Council, a statewide organization founded in 1954 to remove Black integrationists from the community and preserve racial order in the Mississippi, remained dedicated to preventing Black people from registering to vote in the county so that the social order of the South might be maintained, and his defense team possessed the same views on the issue at hand.⁴⁰ When the federal government issued a lawsuit against Lynd in July 1961, the defense team was ready to fight back. In the words of M.M. Roberts, a well-known lawyer in Hattiesburg and member of Lynd's counsel, "In spite of all this, I do hope that we can and will put up a strong fight all the way with some hope of change in the swing of the pendulum on our side before it is too late to protect those who think against those who do not, to protect this nation of ours from a protected, executively controlled society."⁴¹

An in-depth investigation into life of M.M. Roberts including his early life, career as a lawyer, role that he served as a chief and elder member of Theron Lynd's defense team throughout the *United States v. Theron C. Lynd* case, and his dedication to Mississippi higher education through his involvement on the State College Board, reveals many life narratives that bring into question the current legacy of M.M. Roberts. Within the public memory of Southern Miss history, M.M. Roberts is memorialized as a figure that served higher education in Mississippi and Southern Miss. He is remembered as someone who fought tirelessly to enhance the post-secondary educational experience and

⁴⁰ Dennis J. Mitchell, *A New History of Mississippi* (University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 403.

⁴¹ Correspondence between Dugas Shands and M.M. Roberts, 14 March 1961, M27, Box 11, Folder 21, U.S v. Theron C. Lynd- Legal Case Historical Manuscripts, Special Collections, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries.

paved the way for the Mississippi system of public higher education to flourish.⁴² However, his narrative is much deeper than presented by the university, and his active influence in the largely Democrat-led state government and the politics of higher education shows that Roberts played a crucial role in fighting against integration in Mississippi institutions and other efforts to bridge the education gap between Black and white students. This chapter will then balance this narrative against the way in which current historiography, Southern Miss history, and public memory represent the legacy of M.M Roberts to show that Southern Miss only presents parts of Roberts' historical narrative. In fact, Southern Miss silences all narratives about Roberts that connect him to his career as a Hattiesburg lawyer and staunch segregationist in the community. Instead, Southern Miss chooses to shape the public memory of Roberts around his involvement with the State College Board, now the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL), and his financial contributions to the university. However, examining primary sources surrounding the memorialization of M.M. Roberts through the naming of the Southern Miss football stadium reveals that the university intentionally chose to preserve the legacy of a staunch segregationist within university history and public memory through the largest public venue on campus. This left the full legacy of Roberts purposely hidden to protect the legitimacy of the naming of M.M. Roberts' Stadium, one of the most recognized football stadiums in Mississippi.

Known affectionately as "The Rock," USM's football stadium where The University of Southern Mississippi's football team plays its home games was named

⁴² M.M. Roberts, "Concepts of Authority By Courts and Legislatures Affecting Boards of Public Institutions of Higher Learning in the United States," 1964, iv-v.

“M.M. Roberts Stadium” by former university president William D. McCain in 1975. McCain defended the choice, claiming that Roberts helped fund the school during his time as IHL Board president. McCain, a member of both the Citizens Council and the State Sovereignty Commission, was also known as a hard-nosed and outspoken segregationist who sought to preserve the legacy of the sovereignty of Mississippi and keep Black citizens under the oppressive chains of the Jim Crow system.⁴³ This memorialization of Roberts at Southern Miss shifts the focus away from the less known stories about the blatant racism and segregationist views of Roberts and his numerous attempts to help preserve the sovereignty of the state of Mississippi. This can be seen in the way that Roberts is memorialized in university history. Historian Chester Morgan’s official university history, does not mention Roberts’ involvement in the protecting racial superiority in the state’s higher education system. Rather Morgan’s book, presents Roberts’ as “the president of the state college board in the 1960s,” and as a president that “did much to advance Southern’s interests.”⁴⁴ This shows that Southern Miss over time has silenced the parts of Robert’s narrative that are not beneficial to protecting the interests of the university and its public image.

By using primary sources such as witness statements, newspaper articles, editorials, court decision briefs, and most importantly correspondence between M.M. Roberts and the members of his defense counsel team, this chapter examines Roberts’ expectations, motives, and reactions to fighting for the suppression of voting rights in the

⁴³ Ashton Pittman, “Protesting Racism, USM Football Players March from Stadium Named for Segregationist,” *Mississippi Free Press*, August 30, 2020, <https://www.mississippifreepress.org/5542/protesting-racism-usm-football-players-march-from-stadium-named-for-segregationist>.

⁴⁴ Morgan, *Treasured Past, Golden Future*, 124.

South and the advancement of white supremacy in Mississippi during the Civil Rights Movement. Current narratives within Southern Miss historical interpretations fail to provide a clear and unbiased account of Roberts' legacy and rather centralize his commitment to preserving racial order in the state of Mississippi and more specifically institutions of higher learning. It will also analyze how Southern Miss public memory has centralized M.M. Roberts' role in advocating for state government control of education in Mississippi rather than involvement in attempting to preserve racial order in the state. Current historical narratives about Roberts within Southern Miss history fail to even mention his career as a lawyer but rather focus on the memorialization of his life through the naming of the Southern Miss football stadium.

The first part of this chapter will focus on the Roberts' early life, law career, and legal roles in voting rights cases in Mississippi and how these aspects of Roberts' life have been silenced in the collective memory of Mississippi and Southern Miss history. The second part of this chapter will examine Roberts' impact on the Mississippi higher education system through his involvement with the State College Board as well as Southern Miss's current memorialization of him through the naming of the football stadium and official university history publications such as *The Drawl*, the official Southern Miss traditions handbook, and *Treasured Past, Golden Future: The Centennial History of the University of Southern Mississippi*, USM historian Chester Morgan's perceived official history of the university.

Ultimately, this research contextualizes Roberts' life and his impact on the Mississippi legal, political, and social climate of the 1950s and 1960s to suggest that Southern Miss silences elements of Roberts' historical narrative that portray him in a

negative light. Instead, he is presented as a successful member of the Southern Miss community who championed the university through financial contributions and his involvement with the State College Board as president. Southern Miss as an institution operates under the influences of the state government and local political landscape as outlined through organization of the State College Board and later the Institutions of Higher Learning. The role of the state government in overseeing and supporting both public and higher education has been subject to debate by the state legislators throughout the evolution of the modern American education system, and Roberts contributed to defining this relationship during his time serving on the State College Board and his term as president of the board.⁴⁵ Therefore, the public memory of M.M. Roberts within the context of Southern Miss history both is a product of collective demonstration of political power in the state of Mississippi and an example of how the influence of governmental agencies push specific interpretations of historical narrative that reinforce a dominant narrative that poses a political advantage.⁴⁶ Because Southern Miss is a public higher education institution that receives financial support from the Mississippi state government it is influenced by the political oversight of the state government.⁴⁷

“M.M.” Roberts was born on October 24, 1895, to Malcomb Jerome Roberts and Nellie Bond in a two-room log house in a rural area in Jackson County near the

⁴⁵ David G. Sansing, *Making Haste Slowly: The Troubled History of Higher Education in Mississippi* (University Press of Mississippi, 1990), 125, 138.

⁴⁶ David Glassberg, “Public History and the Study of Memory,” *The Public Historian* 18, no. 2, (1996): 7-23, 11-12.

⁴⁷ Because Southern Miss is a public higher education institution that receives financial support from the Mississippi state government and is overseen and governed by the IHL Board, it can be classified as an auxiliary institution of the state government and uses its power to exert cultural authority over minority groups or groups that are excluded from the public sphere of influence in historical memory. (W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory*), 6.

Mississippi Gulf Coast. His mother had previously worked as a washerwoman for a wealthy family in Jackson County and had only received education from a Scottish missionary who worked for an Indian tribe in the area.⁴⁸ Although his mother only had an eighth-grade level education, she left her home and ventured forty-five miles outside of the Jackson County area to teach in a boarding school. While she was teaching at the boarding school, she lived with the parents of Malcomb Jerome Roberts who she later married.⁴⁹ It is worth noting that both of Roberts' grandfathers fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War as many men living in the South did at the beginning of the war.⁵⁰ Roberts grew up with an early awareness of the color of his skin and the privilege that was associated it. For example, when he was three years old, Roberts became very sick, and a doctor from Lucedale painted his skin with a Black substance that was intended to cure him of his illness. Later in his life when Roberts reflected on this early childhood event, he claimed that until the substance had been taken off his body he was, "fearful that [his] skin would thereafter be black."⁵¹

Education was very important to the Roberts family and his parents sought to provide the best opportunities to foster an appreciation for learning for him. He attended the first eight grades of his education at the single-teacher Roberts School that held his family namesake because only the Roberts' family children attended the school.⁵² One-room family or neighborhood schoolhouses similar to the Roberts School were common throughout the nineteenth century rural American South as lack of oversight by the state

⁴⁸ Martin Jr., *Count Them One By One*, 81.

⁴⁹ Martin Jr., *Count Them One By One*, 81

⁵⁰ Martin Jr., *Count Them One By One*, 82.

⁵¹ Martin Jr., *Count Them One By One*, 81.

⁵² Martin Jr., *Count Them One By One*, 82.

government in these smaller communities gave families the freedom create their own educational systems based on their values and educational goals.⁵³ Single-room family schoolhouses became generational family landmarks during the nineteenth century, and as they gained more students in the neighborhood and became standardized they evolved into the earliest forms of public education.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, private education would serve as the foundation for Roberts' passion for advocating for the advancement of educational opportunities for white Mississippians as well as his dedication to lifelong learning opportunities.

Roberts began his journey in higher education as a student at Mississippi Normal College (MNC), later named The University of Southern Mississippi, in 1914 and received his diploma in 1917.⁵⁵ At the time, MNC was not an accredited college to award degrees to students, so Roberts earned his Bachelor's degree in science from Mississippi A&M College (later changed to Mississippi State University) in 1918.⁵⁶ Out of the five original buildings on the campus of MNC, Roberts remembered three of those when reflecting on his time as a student: the Administration Building, Hattiesburg Hall, and Forrest County Hall.⁵⁷ Roberts spent the 1916 football season playing left end for the Mississippi Normal College Normalites.⁵⁸ His brother E.S. Roberts also played on the team, and the two spent the season playing games at Kamper Park in downtown Hattiesburg in front of crowds as large as 1,000 fans.⁵⁹ In a *Hattiesburg American*

⁵³ Jonathan Zimmerman, *Small Wonder: The Little Red Schoolhouse in History and Memory* (Yale University Press, 2009), 20.

⁵⁴ Zimmerman, *Small Wonder*, 20.

⁵⁵ Martin Jr., *Count Them One By One*, 82.

⁵⁶ Morgan, "Roberts Recalls Southern from Days on Team of '16."

⁵⁷ Morgan, "Roberts Recalls Southern from Days on Team of '16."

⁵⁸ Morgan, "Roberts Recalls Southern from Days on Team of '16."

⁵⁹ Morgan, "Roberts Recalls Southern from Days on Team of '16."

article detailing Roberts and his contributions to the MNC football team, Brenda Morgan wrote that Roberts greatly appreciated the impact that his coach A.B. Dilly had on his life and that he learned the value of honesty, fairness, and hard work.⁶⁰ Though the Normalites usually attracted fans from all over the Hattiesburg area, Roberts described the team as “poor,” and the team even lost to Mississippi College 50-0 during the season.⁶¹

While Roberts would go on to receive a Master’s degree from Peabody College, Roberts’ career as a student at Southern Miss spanned almost fifty years because he later completed his Ph.D. in educational administration at the university in 1964 at the age of sixty-eight.⁶² He finished his dissertation and completed his degree five years after he was appointed to serve on the State College Board of Trustees in 1959. Roberts’ dissertation titled, “Concepts of Authority by Courts and Legislatures Affecting Boards of Public Institutions of Higher Learning in the United States,” incorporates what a philosophical research type described as reflective thinking that takes ideas from facts and places them in a reflective model of analysis.⁶³ Roberts’ research examines how state statutes, constitutional amendments, and the interpretations of court decisions, should inform college boards and highlight trends within higher education.⁶⁴ Essentially, Roberts’ dissertation argues that public higher education and state courts and legislatures

⁶⁰ Morgan, “Roberts Recalls Southern from Days on Team of ‘16.”

⁶¹ Morgan, “Roberts Recalls Southern from Days on Team of ‘16.”

⁶² Piliawsky, *Exit 13: Oppression and Racism in Academia*, (South End Press, 1982), 13.

⁶³ M.M. Roberts, “Concepts of Authority By Courts and Legislatures Affecting Boards of Public Institutions of Higher Learning in the United States” (Ph.D diss., Hattiesburg, Mississippi, The University of Southern Mississippi, 1964), 3.

⁶⁴ Roberts, “Concepts of Authority By Courts and Legislatures Affecting Boards of Public Institutions of Higher Learning in the United States” 4.

are intertwined and should inform and guide each other.⁶⁵ For this time period, Roberts' research represented what Dr. William McCain described in the preface of Roberts' dissertation as "far sighted thinking" in the educative processes in Mississippi, and his ideas on the relationship between higher education and politics show his dedication to preserving a state-controlled educational environment.⁶⁶

While current historiography characterizes Roberts as a successful practicing attorney in Hattiesburg, this narrative fails to mention that Roberts served in various educational leadership capacities before deciding to attend law school. After graduating from Mississippi Normal College, Roberts joined the United States Navy during World War I and served as a wireless operator for two years. Following his time in the Navy, Roberts served as an entomologist for the United States Department of Agriculture for the next three years. He then went on to work as a teacher and later principal of Greene County Agricultural High School, where he perfected the curriculum at the school and boosted the school performance to become one of the only accredited high schools in the surrounding area in the early 1920s.⁶⁷ Understanding Roberts' deep passion for learning and education is critical in understanding why Roberts quickly decided to postpone the advancement of his educational career until 1931 and pursued a career in law at The University of Mississippi School of Law instead. At the time that he decided to make this career change, Roberts had no experience in law or any connections to the legal profession.

⁶⁵ Roberts, "Concepts of Authority By Courts and Legislatures Affecting Boards of Public Institutions of Higher Learning in the United States" 4.

⁶⁶ Roberts, "Concepts of Authority By Courts and Legislatures Affecting Boards of Public Institutions of Higher Learning in the United States" vi.

⁶⁷ Martin Jr., *Count Them One By One*, 82.

However, some characterize Roberts as someone who relied on hard work and dedication to the causes that he was passionate about advancing. His desire to create his own legacy is most clearly depicted in an excerpt from the Ole Miss Law Yearbook about the young, fierce aspiring lawyer: “Mine epitaph shall be mine name alone. Ole Miss lawyers will not soon forget Roberts. Large was his bounty and his soul sincere.”⁶⁸ When reflecting on this time as a law student, Roberts described to a younger friend that while he was in law school, he walked one- and one-half miles every day to law school all while also working as a college law librarian to save money for his schooling.⁶⁹

This example depicts Roberts as a hard-working academic and intelligent lawyer. Other sources, however, described Roberts as an inefficient, unprofessional attorney in his field. For instance, when discussing the legacy of M.M. Roberts as a lawyer, John R. Brown, “one of the great judges of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals,” described him as “a real busybody— a fairly competent lawyer.”⁷⁰ Brown would also go one to note that Roberts was “not a good scholar. He just talked all the time, so you really couldn’t tell what he was saying.”⁷¹ These conflicting perspectives on the legacy of Roberts as a lawyer and scholar suggest an inconsistency in the historiographical viewpoints that, when compared, question the reality of Roberts’ character. However, when further examining Roberts’ contributions as an attorney to first the *Peay et. al v. Cox* case and later the more notable the *U.S. v. Lynd* voting rights case in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, Roberts’ primary motivations for working in these two cases were to prevent the federal

⁶⁸ 1926 Ole Miss Annual (University of Mississippi), 51.

⁶⁹ Martin Jr., *Count Them One By One*, 83.

⁷⁰ Martin Jr., *Count Them One By One*, 81.

⁷¹ Martin Jr., *Count Them One By One*, 81.

government from interfering with Mississippi's consistent efforts to deny African Americans the right to vote.

Although the Civil War ended in May 1865, the fight to give Black citizens the same rights as white citizens continued for another century both in the American South and the rest of the nation. The Reconstruction Period enacted by Congress in 1866 aimed to readmit the southern states that made up the Confederacy back into the Union and determine how the United States would handle the introduction of newly freed Black men and women into the sphere of post-Civil War American culture.⁷² Reconstruction also brought about questions regarding the economic, political, and social status of freed African Americans. To settle these questions, Congress passed a series of congressional amendments and laws that defined equal rights for all citizens regardless of race.⁷³ This was the first time in American history that federal laws identified and protected citizen rights. The most important of these actions by Congress were the passage of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution. The Thirteenth Amendment, ratified in 1865, abolished slavery nationwide and gave Congress the power to enforce this amendment.⁷⁴ The Fourteenth Amendment, ratified in 1868, granted citizenship to all persons "born or naturalized in the United States," including formerly enslaved people, and that the State cannot make a law that infringes on the "privileges and immunities" of citizenship.⁷⁵ The Fourteenth Amendment includes the

⁷² Nast et al., "Reconstruction and Its Aftermath - The African American Odyssey," <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/african-american-odyssey/reconstruction.html>.

⁷³ Eric Foner, "The Supreme Court and the History of Reconstruction—and Vice-Versa," *Columbia Law Review* 112, no. 7 (2012): 1585–1606, 1586.

⁷⁴ U.S. Constitution, amend. 13, sec. 1, sec. 2.

⁷⁵ U.S. Constitution, amend. 14, sec. 1.

incorporation clause and the due process clause. However, the Fifteenth Amendment, ratified in 1870, gave all citizens regardless of race the right to vote, was the most controversial of these amendments as many southern states did not want formally enslaved Black citizens to become political equals.⁷⁶ The Reconstruction Period in the South following the Civil War, Black citizens made great strides in gaining voting rights and representation in federal and state government with the help of the Reconstruction Amendments. For instance, during this time, Hiram Revels became the first African American Senator in Congress in 1870, and Black citizens in the South exercised their constitutional right to vote in local, state, and federal elections.

In Mississippi, the Civil War destroyed the state's economic and political stability and threatened to dismantle the social order in the state. It was clear that white Mississippians feared living in a society where Black citizens were treated as political and social equals, and they used a variety of methods to ensure that the two races would remain separated and that Black citizens would stay second class citizens.⁷⁷ Despite the passage of the Reconstruction Amendments and Mississippi's readmission into the Union, a majority of Mississippians did not support a free society where their former enslaved people were counted as equal citizens. To combat this, white Mississippians established a separate society that encompassed all areas of life such as churches and schools.⁷⁸

Despite efforts to maintain a society dominated by white supremacy, Black citizens registered and voted in massive numbers as they sought to utilize their legal

⁷⁶ U.S Constitution, amend. 15, sec. 1.

⁷⁷ Mitchell, *A New History of Mississippi*, 185.

⁷⁸ Mitchell, *A New History of Mississippi*, 185.

power to invite new educational and economic opportunities. However, by the presidential election of 1876, white Democrats across the South had virtually eliminated the Black vote by voter intimidation and ballot stuffing.⁷⁹ This led to widespread voter fraud led to a tightly contested presidential race between Republican Rutherford B. Hayes and Democrat Samuel Tilden, and with the race threatening to end in a tie in the Electoral College, the Southern Democrats led by Mississippian Lucius Q.C Lamar made a deal with the Republicans. The Republicans agreed to remove federal troops from the southern states, and, in return, Hayes won the presidency.⁸⁰ This deal signaled the end of Reconstruction. Although this period of tremendous growth in the South and specifically Mississippi represented a glimmer of hope for newly recognized Black citizens who had just been freed from the physical and psychological chains of oppression and disenfranchisement, this progress would soon be wiped away following the dismal end of Reconstruction.

In the decades following the end of Reconstruction, Mississippi politicians began to lay the legal foundations of their attempt to restore racial order, advance white supremacy, and solidify discrimination by ratifying the 1890 Mississippi State Constitution. With the federal government threatening to intervene in Southern elections and ultimately put a stop to illegal voter intimidation tactics to take the vote away from Black citizens, Mississippi Democrats wrote a state constitution that included a revised scheme for voting eligibility.⁸¹ This constitution gave state and local politicians the legal

⁷⁹ Sturkey, *Hattiesburg: An American City in Black and White*, 20.

⁸⁰ Sturkey, *Hattiesburg*, 20.

⁸¹ William Alexander Mabry, "Disfranchisement of the Negro in Mississippi," *The Journal of Southern History* 4, no. 3 (1938): 318–33, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2191292>, 322.

authority to disenfranchise Black Mississippians by requiring poll taxes and voter registration exams, which required qualified voter to be able to "to read any section of the state constitution; or to be able to understand the same when read to him, or give a reasonable interpretation thereof."⁸² This clause would later be referred to as the "Understanding Clause." Through these practices it is clear that the primary purpose of the 1890 Constitution was to eliminate the Black vote in the Mississippi and to keep Black citizens in an inferior social class.⁸³ These practices as well as public segregation continued in the South as the Supreme Court brought down several consecutive rulings that weakened the privileges and immunities and equal protection clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment and which left Black people without the protection of the federal government.⁸⁴ This allowed white segregationists to advance their white supremacist ideals and motives with little to no intervention from the federal government. In as little as a year, all the progress that the South made in advancing and honoring the rights of Black citizens vanished, leaving Blacks vulnerable to voter intimidation, public segregation, and harassment, and in the worst circumstances, lynching.

Historians will find noticeable gaps in knowledge about the beginning of Roberts law career in Hattiesburg. Current works that detail aspects of Roberts life suggest that he moved to Hattiesburg with his wife Essie Dean, a graduate of Mississippi College for Women, to continue his law career in 1951. However, *Hattiesburg American* newspaper reveals that Roberts lived in Hattiesburg prior to 1951 and involved himself in the *Peay v.*

⁸² Mabry, "Disfranchisement of the Negro in Mississippi," 322.

⁸³ James H. Stone, "A Note on Voter Registration Under the Mississippi Understanding Clause, 1892," *The Journal of Southern History* 38, no. 2 (1972): 293–96, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2206446>, 293.

⁸⁴ Boyette, *Right to Revolt: The Crusade for Racial Justice in Mississippi's Central Piney Woods* (University Press of Mississippi 2015), 8.

Cox voting rights case that was decided in 1951. During the early 1950s, Luther Cox was the Forrest County circuit clerk and voting registrar responsible for ensuring that no Black person in the county could register to vote. Prior to beginning his role as county circuit clerk in 1935, Cox was a World War I combat infantryman, department store bookkeeper, and a deputy sheriff.⁸⁵ Part of Cox's duty as circuit clerk was serving as the county voting registrar, and state law authorized a registrar to determine whether applicants could read sections of the Constitution or interpret a section read to them but not both.⁸⁶ While he believed in the legitimacy of the 1890 Constitution in keeping Black citizens from the voting polls, he often took his efforts to disenfranchise Black citizens further by asking applicants questions about legal process or even asking them "how many bubbles in a bar of soap?"⁸⁷ During his almost twenty years as the voting registrar, Cox deemed thousands of Black citizens unqualified to vote citing that they failed to meet the qualifications under the Understanding Clause. However, the only true requirement to be able to register to vote was purely the color of someone's skin.

In response to this, fourteen local Black leaders from Hattiesburg lead by Hammond Smith and I.C. Peay hired the white attorney T. Price Dale to sue Luther Cox for his role in racially based voter discrimination in the spring of 1950.⁸⁸ Dale, the former mayor of Columbus, Mississippi, and a chancery judge for sixteen years, was well into his late sixties when the case was first filed. While he was part of the white supremacist government establishment, he was considered an outlier in this establishment and was

⁸⁵ Martin Jr., *Count Them One By One*, 3.

⁸⁶ Martin Jr., *Count Them One By One*, 3.

⁸⁷ Martin Jr., *Count Them One By One*, 3.

⁸⁸ Sturkey, *Hattiesburg*, 229.

passionate about fairness in court.⁸⁹ He and his brother Sebe Dale who also served as a lawyer and judge were completely different people. Sebe Dale was both a member of the Citizens' Council and an associate of Gov. Theodore Bilbo, while T. Dale did not support Bilbo or any of the causes of the Citizens' Council.⁹⁰ These local Black men represented the entirety of the local Black community as many were business owners, pastors, doctors, and many more backgrounds that constituted for a wide array of economic and educational opportunities for Black Hattiesburgers. Dale knew that each of these men had been college trained and he prepared to fight for their right to vote. The case *Peay et. al. v. Cox* was officially filed in federal court on April 11, 1950, and represented a monumental shift in attacking the system discrimination and racism that hid within Mississippi government.⁹¹

When this case was filed against Cox, an expansive team of twenty-two local attorneys joined forces to serve as Cox's official legal defense. Spearheading this defense was local attorney M.M. Roberts. A newspaper article titled, "Asks Dismissal of Voting Case" published in the *Hattiesburg American* on May 6, 1950, lists M.M. Roberts as one of the attorneys representing Cox in the suit.⁹² The article also mentioned that Cox's team of attorneys sought get the suit against Cox dismissed on the grounds that the plaintiffs should have utilized the state judicial system instead of going straight to the federal district courts.⁹³ Roberts was the lead attorney in the case, having signed Cox's court brief when the appellants of the case appealed to the United States Fifth Circuit Court of

⁸⁹ Martin Jr., *Count Them One By One*, 3.

⁹⁰ Martin Jr., *Count Them One By One*, 11.

⁹¹ Sturkey, *Hattiesburg*, 230

⁹² "Asks Dismissal of Voting Case" *Hattiesburg American*, May 6, 1950, 1.

⁹³ "Asks Dismissal of Voting Case," 1.

Appeals after segregationist federal district court judge Sydney C. Mize dismissed the case on the grounds that the appellants should have first appealed to the State Elections Commission on the matter.⁹⁴ In Cox's brief, the appellants claimed that "No attack here is made on the State Constitution or statutes" and that "No right, title, or interest of the state is here sought to be recovered or affected."⁹⁵ While on the surface, this brief seems to demonstrate logical arguments that invalidate the federal court's jurisdiction in the case and propose that the case should have been left for the Mississippi state courts to hear, it is simply an attempt by the legal team to divert the attention away from the legality of Cox's actions and penalize the plaintiffs for a nonexistent failure of process. Doing this minimized the damage that Cox had caused by disenfranchising Black voting applicants and centralized the perceived supremacy of state legal processes. The only caveat with this is that the processes of the state were designed to support a social and political order where Blacks were second class citizens in all aspects, and M.M. Roberts outwardly supported this cause through his involvement in the case.

Not only was M.M. Roberts directly involved using his legal career to prevent Blacks from both voting and achieving any type of racial, economic, and social equality, he was on the front line of defense for the sovereignty of Mississippi and advancement of white supremacy. His role in supporting the legal system in its attempts to bar Black applicants from registering to vote must be considered and further examined when evaluating the legacy of M.M. Roberts in both Hattiesburg and Mississippi history. However, his involvement in the *Cox* voting rights case was merely the beginning of

⁹⁴ Sturkey, *Hattiesburg*, 230.

⁹⁵ Roberts, Peay et. al. v. Cox, June 21, 1951.

Roberts' legal career. The ten years between *Peay v. Cox* and *U.S v. Lynd* provide further insight into Roberts' personality and motivations for fighting against civil rights progress in the South. Walter Lord described Mississippi's efforts to prevent Black citizens from securing the right to vote and gaining political equality as persistent and effective. He wrote that the political sphere of Mississippi was "not a courthouse bully, but a massive recalcitrance that was more difficult to surmount because it was so formless, so intangible, so hard to get at. It didn't smash the Negro; it simply wore him down, tired him out, drained his energy, until he finally stopped trying altogether."⁹⁶

While the *Cox* case was unsuccessful in putting an end to the tactics used by Luther Cox to deny Black voter registration applicants, it demonstrated a new tactic of utilizing the legal system to compile expansive records of failed Black voter registration. This strategy combined with bypassing local and state judiciaries and filing straight to the federal judiciary posed a unique challenge to white attorneys and politicians seeking to prevent Blacks from voting and obtaining racial, economic, and social equality. M.M. Roberts placed himself at the center of this battle between local white circuit clerks in Mississippi and federal attorney and he would serve as a fierce advocate and leader of the defense team for Theron C. Lynd in the monumental court case that would serve as a landmark decision in Black enfranchisement in the Mississippi.

The Civil Rights Act of 1957 and the Civil Rights Act of 1960 served as two of the most critical pieces of voting rights legislation prior to the Voting Rights Act of 1965 because they both created specific guidelines and procedures that gave the federal government jurisdiction to oversee and investigate voting procedures particularly in the

⁹⁶ Walter Lord, *The Past That Would Not Die* (London H. Hamilton Press, 1966), 122.

South. Following the failure of the *Peay v. Cox*, newly appointed Mississippi NAACP field secretary Medgar Evers arranged for Black Hattiesburgers who were denied the right to vote to complete notarized legal testimonies describing their inability to register to vote.⁹⁷ Most importantly, Evers arranged for Reverend W.D. Ridgeway and Reverend John Barnes to testify in front of the Senate subcommittee on constitutional rights in 1957 because he believed it was crucial to have federal government intervention in the southern states. These hearings ultimately led to the passage of the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960.

The Civil Rights Act of 1957 created a Commission on Civil Rights to “investigate allegations in writing under oath or affirmation that certain citizens of the United States are being deprived of their right to vote and have that vote counted by reason of their color, race, religion, or national origin.”⁹⁸ This act also created the Civil Rights Division in the United States Department of Justice that would be led by a new assistant attorney general for civil rights. However, this act limited the federal government from enforcing fair and lawful voting practices in states that had voter discrimination tactics written into their constitutions and their practices. Although Senate majority leader Lyndon B. Johnson was one of the primary advocates for both acts, he considered the 1957 act to be ineffective. He also acknowledged that the acts were just the beginning for enforcing the Fifteenth Amendment in the southern states.⁹⁹ On the other hand, the Black community saw these acts as ineffective and even saw them as taking a step back on the progress that had been made to secure the right to vote for Black

⁹⁷ Sturkey, *Hattiesburg*, 277.

⁹⁸ Sturkey, *Hattiesburg*, 277.

⁹⁹ Robert Caro, *Master of the Senate: The Years of Lyndon B. Johnson* (New York Vintage, 2002), 1003.

citizens.¹⁰⁰ To the public, the Civil Rights Act of 1960 was even more of a perceived failure, and it is often missing in historiography about the legal elements of the Civil Rights Movement. However, among the random assortment of clauses and provisions described in the Act is one that is consistently overlooked by civil rights historiography and absent from the collective memory of civil rights. Title II of the 1960 Civil Rights Act requires all election officials to keep copies of voting-related records for twenty-two months and requires that these documents be handed over to the U.S. attorney general when requested.¹⁰¹

Following the passage of these two acts, the newly created Civil Rights Division, led by incoming U.S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, hit the ground running to enforce the Civil Rights Act. He first appointed Burke Marshall to head the Division, and under his leadership, the Division devised a plan to investigating incidents of voter discrimination in the southern states and filing at least one case of voter discrimination against one voting registrar in one county in each of the three judicial districts in the southern states.¹⁰² From there, attorneys hired by the Division hit the roads throughout the South, investigating and interviewing county registrar and citizens who believed they had been discriminated against. It was through this plan that the Division learned of Theron Lynd and his unlawful application of the understandings clause that discriminated against black voting applicants.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ "Our Opinions: Our Crippled Civil Rights Bill," *Chicago Defender*, September 28, 1957, 10.

¹⁰¹ John Doar, "The Work of the Civil Rights Division in Enforcing Voting Rights Under the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960," 1997, 1-2.

¹⁰² Doar, "The Work of the Civil Rights Division in Enforcing Voting Rights Under the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960," 3.

¹⁰³ Doar, "The Work of the Civil Rights Division in Enforcing Voting Rights Under the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960," 8.

While this legislation did not produce any concrete accomplishments in voting rights, the law showed promising signs of federal intervention years after the *Cox* case. Even after *Peay v. Cox* was settled December 1951, Roberts continued to involve himself in conversations regarding ongoing investigations by the Civil Rights Division into the Forrest County voter registration records in 1958. Correspondence shows that Roberts kept constant communication with Senator James Eastland of Mississippi. Eastland, known in the public memory as one of the South's most visible segregationists of the post-World War II period, served in the United States Senate for over thirty years and served as the chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee's subcommittee on civil rights.¹⁰⁴ Throughout his political career, Eastland was often compared to his political foil, fellow Mississippi Senator John C. Stennis who was seen as a "courtly Mississippi Democrat."¹⁰⁵ While Stennis has multiple buildings named in his honor such as the NASA space center in Hancock County, Mississippi and a political science research center at Mississippi State University, Eastland has had his name removed from a federal courthouse in Jackson.¹⁰⁶ It is clear that Stennis's legacy fared much better in the public memory than Eastland even they both represented the interests of the segregationist South, and he is still memorialized in the state of Mississippi today.

An examination of Roberts' correspondence during the early years of the *Lynd* trial shows that he kept regular communication with Senator Eastland. Roberts strived to work with the connections that he had in the federal government to maintain racial

¹⁰⁴ Chris Myers Asch, *The Senator and the Sharecropper: The Freedom Struggles of James O. Eastland and Fannie Lou Hamer* (The New Press, 2011), 135.

¹⁰⁵ Maarten Zwiers, "Good Cop, Bad Cop: Segregationist Strategies and Democratic Party Politics in Mississippi, 1948-1960," *Southern Quarterly* 54, no. 1, 29-53, 30.

¹⁰⁶ Zwiers, "Good Cop, Bad Cop," 30.

superiority and the sovereignty of the state at the forefront of Mississippi politics. In a letter written in 1958 to Eastland regarding A.H. Rosenfeld, the Director of the Office of Complaints Information and Survey in the Civil Rights Division, Roberts wrote, “One thought is that Cox ought to tell them that he did deal more liberally with whites than with negros in registration and the other thought that Cox should not commit himself either way. The latter course was the one that Mr. Cox elected to follow and that we did.”¹⁰⁷ In the same letter, Roberts passionately called members of the Civil Rights Commission “negro loving idiots” who are out to “destroy the conservatism of the South.”¹⁰⁸ Through this letter Roberts demonstrated both his resentment towards the Civil Rights Division and his willingness to utilize his political connections in Washington D.C. to advocate for what he believed to be the cultural heritage of the South. While Roberts’ passion for what he considers to be preserving the everyday life, and political climate of the American, historiography examining southern identity demonstrates that the “southern way of life,” that Roberts’ seeks to preserve is inexplicably reserved for white Southerners only.¹⁰⁹

Additionally, Roberts and Senator Eastland maintained regular correspondence with each other on topics outside of voting rights cases, and they occasionally discussed the direction of the federal court system. Roberts regularly expressed resentment towards liberal-leaning justices on the Supreme Court in his correspondence to Eastland and

¹⁰⁷ Correspondence between James Eastland and M.M. Roberts, 3 October 1958, M27, Box 11, Folder 21, U.S v. Theron C. Lynd- Legal Case Historical Manuscripts, Special Collections, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries.

¹⁰⁸ Correspondence between James Eastland and M.M. Roberts, 3 October 1958, M27, Box 11, Folder 21, U.S v. Theron C. Lynd- Legal Case Historical Manuscripts, Special Collections, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries.

¹⁰⁹ Brundage, *The Southern Past*, 2.

voiced his desire to have some of them impeached. In another letter to Eastland in 1958, Roberts explained that even a failed impeachment attempt “would still be advantageous from our point of view” in that it would help build a legal record against the justices.¹¹⁰ Roberts’s reasoning behind this request is ironic because although *Peay v. Cox* was unsuccessful in enfranchising Black voters, it introduced the idea of maintaining records of failed voter registration attempts for future lawsuits like the *Lynd* case.

Roberts exhibited his confusion and displeasure with the federal government’s influence over the social and political spheres of the South through many different subjects of correspondence, and these examples all enhance the narrative of Roberts’s legal and moral views leading up to the *Lynd* case. On September 30, 1958, Roberts decided to express his frustrations to President Dwight Eisenhower through a letter tailored to questioning the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision. In the letter, Roberts argued that forced school integration in the South had interrupted “the friendly and cordial relationships existing between races” and stated that “the best of our people are greatly concerned.”¹¹¹ He also claimed that “subversive influences” were responsible for the actions of the NAACP and other progressive minority groups.¹¹² Through these claims Roberts expressed his concern that these influences would affect the integrity of the courts, and his strong resentment toward school desegregation aligned with the

¹¹⁰Correspondence between James Eastland and M.M. Roberts, 7 October 1958, M27, Box 11, Folder 21, U.S v. Theron C. Lynd- Legal Case Historical Manuscripts, Special Collections, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries.

¹¹¹ Correspondence between Dwight Eisenhower and M.M. Roberts, 30 September 1958, M27, Box 11, Folder 21, U.S v. Theron C. Lynd- Legal Case Historical Manuscripts, Special Collections, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries.

¹¹² Correspondence between Dwight Eisenhower and M.M. Roberts, 30 September 1958, M27, Box 11, Folder 21, U.S v. Theron C. Lynd- Legal Case Historical Manuscripts, Special Collections, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries.

“massive resistance” movement against the *Brown* decision. Under this massive resistance movement in the Deep South, southern politicians and other elite community figures utilized the court decision and the Court’s inability to oversee the enforcement of the *Brown* decision to resist and devise plans to delay the school integration as much as possible.¹¹³ Inserting Roberts into the school integration narrative of the late 1950s, illustrates his expansive influence in Hattiesburg during his law career and contributes to his legacy by presenting an element of his civic involvement that historiography consistently misses.

While some studies portray Roberts as an ambitious, hard-working lawyer dedicated to fighting to preserve the social structure of the Deep South, this narrative lacks depth and fails to provide an accurate perspective of Roberts’s true dedication to the case. In fact, examining Roberts’s professional correspondence in the year leading up to the federal lawsuit against Theron Lynd, reveals that Roberts carefully planned to involve himself in the *Lynd* voting rights case in any way possible. The Civil Rights Act of 1960 compiled several different types of rules and regulations into one piece of legislation. However, Title III of this act which “required all election officials to retain copies of any voting-related records for twenty-two months and deliver copies of these documents to the attorney general of the United States upon request” gave the federal government direct jurisdiction in investigate unfair voter registration practices in the South.¹¹⁴

Under this act, agents from the Civil Rights Division began following leads on reports of discriminatory voting registration practices by county circuit clerks. In Leflore

¹¹⁴ Sturkey, *Hattiesburg*, 277

County in August 1960, FBI investigators began interviewing citizens in the community under the Civil Rights Act of 1960, and the Leflore County Bar Association published an article in the local newspaper informing citizens that they have the right to refuse to speak to the investigators.¹¹⁵ At the same time, FBI investigators were also in Forrest County interviewing witnesses and Theron Lynd regarding illegal voter registration practices. Roberts was aware of this and feared that this jeopardized the sovereignty of Mississippi. After seeing the response by the Leflore County Bar Association regarding the presence of the Civil Rights Division in Mississippi, Roberts wrote to the lead lawyers of the bar association praising them for the publicity that they brought to the issue at hand by utilizing the newspaper.¹¹⁶ This illustrates Roberts' intentional desire to work against advances of the federal government to preserve the social order of the South.

After the Department of Justice requested the voting registration records from both Leflore and Forrest County, Roberts followed the events taking place in these counties closely connected with lawyers involved in the events. In a letter to William Bizzell, a member of the Leflore County Bar Association, Roberts wrote that he anticipated a suit in court soon and that "somehow I think we will not want to capitulate without resistance."¹¹⁷ This gives further insight to Roberts' involvement in the voting rights investigations in Mississippi and enhances his narrative. Even before the actual

¹¹⁵ Leflore County Bar Association, "Leflore County Bar Association Advises on Individual Rights," *Good Commoner*, August 27, 1960.

¹¹⁶ Correspondence between Leflore County Bar Association and M.M. Roberts, 30 August 1960, M27, Box 11, Folder 21, U.S v. Theron C. Lynd-Legal Case Historical Manuscripts, Special Collections, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries.

¹¹⁷ Correspondence between William Bizzell and M.M. Roberts, 21 September 1960, M27, Box 11, Folder 21, U.S v. Theron C. Lynd-Legal Case Historical Manuscripts, Special Collections, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries.

lawsuit was filed against Theron Lynd in 1961, Roberts anticipated this happening and sought to surround himself and Lynd with a supportive and dedicated team of attorneys to give him the best chance to win the case. For instance, on September 1, 1960, Roberts wrote to Dugas Shands, Assistant Attorney General for the state of Mississippi, asking for his extensive assistance in the potential lawsuit against Lynd and praised him for his great work as an attorney: “Please know that the writer of this letter respects greatly your legal ability and admires your positive stand on a delicate subject.”¹¹⁸ Roberts even explained to Shands in his letter that he had cleared a space in his office library for materials pertaining to the pending lawsuit and that he was willing to receive more documents pertaining to the matter. Additionally, on the same day, Theron Lynd wrote to Dugas Shands asking for his assistance in the case. He explained in the letter that he was passionate about maintaining “our way of life” in Forrest County, and he expressed that “[y]our extended study in this field of law make you valuable to all of Mississippi in our efforts to avoid further encroachments.”¹¹⁹ Because these letters were sent to Shands on the same day, Roberts influenced Lynd in his decision to reach out to Shands. Roberts understood the significance of surrounding himself and Lynd with the top legal experts to support them in the case, and this correspondence shows Roberts’ willingness to reach out to leading attorneys in Mississippi to support Lynd and defend the state sovereignty. Roberts’s role in helping to build Lynd’s legal defense team prior to the formal lawsuit

¹¹⁸ Correspondence between Dugas Shands and M.M. Roberts, 1 September 1960, M27, Box 11, Folder 21, U.S v. Theron C. Lynd- Legal Case Historical Manuscripts, Special Collections, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries.

¹¹⁹ Correspondence between Dugas Shands and Theron Lynd, 1 September 1960, M27, Box 11, Folder 21, U.S v. Theron C. Lynd- Legal Case Historical Manuscripts, Collection. Special Collections, McCain Archives and History Library, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries.

being filed by the federal government demonstrates his passionate intent in defending Lynd and supporting the disenfranchisement of Black voters in Mississippi.

M.M. Roberts' primary motivations for choosing to serve on Lynd's legal team in the *U.S v. Lynd* case, can almost entirely be found in his correspondence with members of Lynd's defense team. Almost immediately following the certification of the federal lawsuit filed against Lynd by John Doar and Roberts Owens of the Civil Rights Division on July 6, 1961, Roberts sent a message to Lynd expressing his full support and devotion to both his case and the significant role the case would play in the future of voting rights for Black Americans. In a letter received by Lynd on July 8, 1961, Roberts expressed that the *Lynd* case was going to be "a full-time operation and Mr. Zachary and I, as lawyers, will be able to make a career of it." He also suggested that fighting in this case he would "be serving Mississippi and our way of life in this effort... I hope that we never take the attitude of the defeatist but always feel in our hearts that we are right and that right ought to prevail and that we ought to win."¹²⁰ This correspondence illustrated Roberts' intentional desire to invest his time to defending Lynd in this case as a means of fighting for the Southern way of life, a life that included the carefully calculated disenfranchisement of Black people and exertion of white racial superiority.

In his communications with the rest of the Lynd legal defense team, Roberts never hesitated to express his displeasure in the direction that the United States government was heading, and he often inserted these sudden outbursts at the end of his correspondences. For instance, in a letter sent on July 13, 1961 to Theron Lynd and Francis Zachary

¹²⁰ Correspondence between Theron C. Lynd and M.M. Roberts, 8 July 1961, M27, Box 11, Folder 15, U.S v. Theron C. Lynd- Legal Case Historical Manuscripts Collection, Special Collections, McCain Archives and History Library, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries.

regarding the defenses request for the Mississippi state attorney general to defend Lynd at the case hearing, Roberts exclaimed, “in Washington, they play politics to the destruction of great segments of our society; and great segments of our society look on those things done in Washington as contrary to the will of our people and unconstitutional and these two opposing forces make all of us something less than what Americans want to be.”¹²¹ Roberts’ willingness to insert his personal stances on the direction of the federal government in correspondence directed toward the legal proceedings and procedures of the *Lynd* case suggests that Roberts chose to work on Lynd’s defense team to work against the progress that the U.S. government was making to intervene on the wrongdoings of the South in order to keep its racial hierarchy intact. Roberts recognized the spotlight and danger that the emerging federal intervention posed on keeping Mississippi’s discriminatory voting registration tactics in place, and his rhetoric in correspondence highlights his determination to do anything in his power to resist the tides of change and racial equality.

In a letter to Dugas Shands on July 19, 1961 intended to address Shands’ role as a defense attorney in the case, Roberts admitted that his worst fear in life was that the “continued agitation on the half of our government against our best citizens will undermine the loyalty which ought to be in the hearts of every American and result in a rapid approach to determination of our way of life, and even of the United States of

¹²¹ Correspondence between Theron C. Lynd, Francis Zachary and M.M. Roberts, 13 July 1961, M27, Box 11, Folder 15, U.S v. Theron C. Lynd- Legal Case Historical Manuscript Collection, Special Collection, McCain Archives and History Library, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries.

America which we all love so much.”¹²² In the same correspondence, Roberts continued to explain that he was ashamed of the way Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy and President John F. Kennedy were “affecting the hearts of men of great worth in our state and area” and that he wished that their efforts would be “that of peacemakers and not as troublemakers as they are now to us.”¹²³ These comments by Roberts just days after the lawsuit was filed against Lynd and before any major advancements in the case, add compelling elements to current historiography that challenges viewpoints of the stakes of the case. Evaluating these comments made by Roberts places him at the center of the narrative and illustrates his intentional desires to preserve the “Southern way of life,” a way that countless white Southern politicians sought to advance through the disenfranchisement of Black citizens.

While current USM historiography steers clear of investigating the specific white supremacist motivations of prominent figures in monumental historical events, revealing these elements of the historical narrative through primary source analysis proves that all aspects a of historical moment should be examined when choosing to memorialize these events in local history. Examining Roberts’ early life, law career, and involvement introduces the beginning of conflicting representations of M.M. Roberts in official institutional histories at Southern Miss and the public memory of his relationship to the university. Influences from interpretations of civil rights history in Mississippi and power

¹²²Correspondence between Dugas Shands and M.M. Roberts, 19 July 1961, M27, Box 11, Folder 15, U.S v. Theron C. Lynd- Legal Case Historical Manuscripts, Special Collections, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries.

¹²³ Correspondence between Dugas Shands and M.M. Roberts, 19 July 1961, M27, Box 11, Folder 15, U.S v. Theron C. Lynd- Legal Case Historical Manuscripts, Special Collections, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries.

from institutions such as the state government and university leaders have shaped the public memory of Roberts. Therefore, his legacy has been formed not by the person that he truly was but rather by the elements of his narrative that highlight his accomplishments and justify the power that he held during the period of Mississippi history that he lived in. According to historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage, historical memory shapes institution identity, and this research shows that this could not be truer for M.M. Roberts' identity in Southern Miss history.¹²⁴

While Roberts and the rest of his team would eventually lose the battle for voting rights suppression in the state of Mississippi when the Voting Rights Act was passed in 1965, his legacy as an influential member of both The University of Southern Mississippi and Hattiesburg communities would continue. Following his involvement in the *Peay v. Cox* and *Lynd v. U.S.* cases, Roberts took an active role in the politics of higher education in Mississippi through his appointment to the State College Board. During this stint of his professional career, Roberts worked against integration efforts in state universities, fought to bar progressive public speakers from universities and supported universities in firing faculty who held liberal beliefs that contradicted those of the state government and the State College Board. While Mississippi higher education historiography characterizes Roberts as a staunch defender of higher education atmosphere dominated by white supremacy and one that excludes the voices minority groups, USM's memorialization of Roberts presents a vastly different narrative that silences the parts of his narrative that would present him in a negative light.

¹²⁴ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Where These Memories Grow: History, Memory, and Southern Identity* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 4.

According to Monte Pilawsky's exposé of higher education in Mississippi titled *Exit 13: Racism and Oppression in Academia*, M.M. Roberts was "chiefly responsible for blazing the downward path of higher education in Mississippi."¹²⁵ This statement is seen as an exaggeration once compared to the complex relationship between the Mississippi state government, M.M. Roberts', and his service to the State College Board. These musings should be seen as an overlooked element of his legacy and the memorialization of his public memory. Following his legal career, Roberts' was appointed to the State College Board of Trustees in 1959 by Governor Ross Barnett along with five other appointees.¹²⁶ Governor Barnett, one of Roberts' Ole Miss law school friends, awarded him a twelve-year seat on the board, the longest possible term.¹²⁷ Barnett was also a staunch segregationist and was committed to ensuring that higher education fell under the control of the state government. His appointments to the board represented another layer to the constant blending of the roles of politics, government, and education in the decisions of the State College Board.¹²⁸ His persistence in ensuring that the State College Board represented his segregationist views on higher education demonstrates the return to a politically oriented board.

As both a friend of Barnett and a proponent of entrenched segregation in the state of Mississippi, Roberts sought to support Barnett and his political decisions in any way possible. One example of this can be seen in the State College Board's handling of James Meredith's successful attempt to enroll at the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss) as

¹²⁵ Pilawsky, *Exit 13: Oppression and Racism in Academia*, 38.

¹²⁶ Sansing, *Making Haste Slowly*, 170.

¹²⁷ Vinson, "Mississippi's Master Racist," 23.

¹²⁸ Sansing, *Making Haste Slowly*, 155.

well as the conferring of his diploma. In 1962, the State College Board faced injunctions and charges of contempt as Meredith attempted to enroll at Ole Miss. When faced with either giving in to admitting Meredith or facing these charges as a college board, Roberts was one of the five Barnett appointees who stood firm in wanting to deny Meredith entry into Ole Miss. Even being in contempt of court did not matter because they knew the federal government would not send them to jail for the offense.¹²⁹ Roberts was willing to stand with both his colleagues on the college board and Barnett to ensure that the racial order in Mississippi higher education system remained intact. Roberts affirmed his allegiance to Barnett by voting to withhold James Meredith's diploma although he had completed all degree requirements.¹³⁰ Roberts' active role in fighting against James Meredith's legacy of success for integrating and matriculating at the University of Mississippi are examples of how his narrative and legacy within the context of Southern Miss are directed by the influence of the State College Board as an extension of the state government.

According to Michel-Rolph Trouillot's *Silencing the Past*, historical production is controlled by the most powerful members or institutions in the society or community and that silences in historical narratives are representations of societal struggles.¹³¹ James Meredith and M.M. Roberts are both memorialized within their respective areas of institutional public memory as well as broad collective memory of Mississippi history for actions that resulted in what is perceived to be for the greater advancement of higher

¹²⁹ Sansing, *Making Haste Slowly*, 159.

¹³⁰ Piliawsky, *Exit 13: Oppression and Racism in Academia*, 38.

¹³¹ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing The Past: Power and the Production of History* (Beacon Press, 1995) 25-26.

education. Both are seen as trailblazers. However, Roberts' involvement in Meredith's plight is silenced in Mississippi higher education history, civil rights history, and Southern Miss history because the state government and college board controlled the way that he was presented in the media. Roberts' involvement in the Meredith narrative is not mentioned in any official Southern Miss histories because doing so would discredit his narrative in the public memory. Ultimately, the State College Board saw Meredith's successful integration attempt as a failed attempt to keep racial order, and they sought opportunities to control the intellectual freedom and thought within the system of higher education and to preserve what Robert's saw as the diminishing "Southern way of life," a way of life that was inherently exclusive to white people.¹³² These efforts continued for Roberts and the rest of the State College Board through the rest of Barnett's term as governor.

However, the election of Paul B. Johnson as governor marked "a turning point in Mississippi's resistance to change," and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 created a large pool of Black voters in the state that would have the freedom to exercise their right and even hold public office. Despite this, many Mississippians refused to give up in their fight to preserve their past way of life, and this was especially true of the State College Board led largely in part by M.M. Roberts and other Barnett appointees. With Johnson's goal to rid the state government and social institutions of racial malice, hate, and prejudice in hopes that the state would fight for its "share of tomorrow," Roberts and his college board of trustees initiated and upheld "speaker bans" across the major universities in the state to block speakers and state leaders that shared liberal viewpoints on racially

¹³² Sansing, *Making Haste Slowly*, 196

equality or Black empowerment from coming to speak at these universities.¹³³ Because colleges and universities can be seen as melting pots for new ideas, perspectives on issues of social, political, or economic value, Robert's believed that controlling the intellectual arena of an institution across Mississippi campuses was "good for Mississippi."¹³⁴ Roberts' also stated, "If I had my way, we would have one rule about speakers that no one would be permitted on any campus of any school in this state except teachers."¹³⁵ This, he rationalized, would keep campuses in order and would "clean house for those who do not understand Mississippi and its ways of life."¹³⁶ Not only was Roberts the chief facilitator of these speaker ban policies put in place by the college board to bypass federal court authorities, but he also represented the board of trustees when these rules were challenged. For instance, when Charles Evers challenged the "Aaron Henry speaker" ban at universities in Mississippi, Roberts served as the board's defense attorney.

Although there are still noteworthy gaps in research surrounding Roberts's early life and career, examining his role in the state government and higher education reveals the direct influence that the Mississippi state government has on the public memory of Roberts. It also shows that in regard to Roberts's narrative, the university's conscious effort to memorialize Roberts through naming the football stadium after him shows that the university operates in conjunction with the politics of the state government to magnify favorable narratives in the public memory and silence those that could place

¹³³ Vinson, "Mississippi's Master Racist," 23.

¹³⁴ Vinson, "Mississippi's Master Racist," 24.

¹³⁵ Vinson, "Mississippi's Master Racist," 24.

¹³⁶ Vinson, "Mississippi's Master Racist," 24.

negative or controversial attention on the state and the university. Because the university represents an outward facing institution in the community and city that it is part of it, the university can be considered a symbol of the community.¹³⁷ In this way the university serves as a cultural center and meeting place for both members of the university and the greater public. University officials, then, seek to utilize the physical campus and environment to portray the school in a positive light, recruit students, and satisfy university stakeholders such as donors, notable alumni, and university faculty and administrators.¹³⁸ During football season, M.M. Roberts Stadium attracts up to 33,000 campus visitors and the trademark building on campus serves as the connection points for many people in the university community.

It makes sense from a university-first perspective to commemorate M.M. Roberts by naming one of the most prominent structures on campus after him at the height of his leadership on the State College Board and his efforts to make higher education in Mississippi for whites only. Additionally, continuing to examine Roberts' life prior to the *Lynd* case and his subsequent involvement with higher education in Mississippi through the IHL Board shows that Southern Miss operates under the influence of politics and state government. It calls into question how society chooses to memorialize elements of a person's legacy and shifts the focus of Roberts's career and contributions to Mississippi back to his involvement in the *Lynd* case. This research opens new doors to further examinations into his life that will continue to unveil the significance of M.M. Roberts's

¹³⁷ Blake Gumprecht, "The Campus as a Public Place in the American College Town," *Journal of Historical Geography* 33 (2007), 72-103, 103.

¹³⁸ Gumprecht, "The Campus as a Public Place in the American College Town," 103.

narrative to Southern Miss history and that legacy that he leaves behind at the university for future generations.

CHAPTER III: OSEOLA MCCARTY AND THE SCHOOL ON HARDY STREET

On October 6, 2020, the University of Southern Mississippi Foundation Board of Directors unveiled a new memorial on the Weathersby Lawn, located directly across from Shoemaker Square, a bricked plaza at the heart of campus. The memorial was dedicated to honor the twenty-fifth anniversary of Oseola McCarty's unexpected \$150,000 gift to the University in the summer of 1995, an event that sparked global attention for the "humble washerwoman" and the University.¹³⁹ The life-size bronze statute features McCarty sitting in a chair, holding a Bible, and facing the fountain in Shoemaker Square. A bronze plaque stands next to her detailing her story to invite students and campus visitors to stop and learn about her life and connection to USM. Directly next to her is an empty bronze chair that students and guests are encouraged to take a seat in, just as many of her friends and family did over the years at her house on Miller Street in downtown Hattiesburg.¹⁴⁰

Across campus, McCarty is remembered for her humble and generous spirit, grit, and determination to provide educational opportunities for others. Her unexpected gift to some "captured the hearts of all who heard the story," and her legacy at Southern Miss will forever be connected to her "abundant generosity."¹⁴¹ Inspired by her generosity, over 800 people from across the nation donated money to the scholarship endowment established by the USM Foundation in her honor in 1995. The purpose of the Oseola

¹³⁹ Pitts, "USM Foundation Honors Oseola McCarty's Life and Legacy," The University of Southern Mississippi.

¹⁴⁰ Pitts, "USM Foundation Honors Oseola McCarty's Life and Legacy."

¹⁴¹ USM Foundation, "About Oseola McCarty." The University of Southern Mississippi.

McCarty Scholarship Endowment is to “award a scholarship to students with financial needs who represent an undeserved population and who graduated from a public school in the Hattiesburg/south Mississippi area.”¹⁴² In fact, as of the twenty-fifth anniversary of her donation to Southern Miss, the scholarship endowment had awarded \$631,397 to 130 students in the South Mississippi region.¹⁴³ According to the USM Foundation, “McCarty’s example is a powerful reminder that no matter how humble one’s circumstances may be, there is always an opportunity to help someone else. She continues to inspire others with her outstanding and improbable act, exemplifying the generosity for which Mississippians are known.”¹⁴⁴ In 2018, the Oseola McCarty Scholars Program was created at Southern Miss as an extension of the scholarship program, operating under the benevolent values McCarty embodied, ensuring scholars in the program participate in a variety of activities focusing on leadership, community service, and workplace development.¹⁴⁵ Students are selected for this through “a fair, freshman competitive scholarship application process,” according to the program website.¹⁴⁶ Through this approach, McCarty’s life will always be connected to her diligent commitment to helping provide access to higher education for many students.

McCarty is memorialized on campus and in the Hattiesburg community in several different ways, both big and small. For instance, in April 2002, a newly constructed residence hall was named “Oseola McCarty Hall” because of a student-driven initiative to

¹⁴² USM Foundation, “Oseola McCarty Scholarship Endowment - The University of Southern Mississippi Scholarships,” The University of Southern Mississippi.

¹⁴³ USM Foundation, “About Oseola McCarty,” The University of Southern Mississippi

¹⁴⁴ USM Foundation, “About Oseola McCarty.”

¹⁴⁵ “Oseola McCarty Scholars Program, ” Undergraduate Scholarships, The University of Southern Mississippi.

¹⁴⁶ “Oseola McCarty Scholars Program.”

have McCarty remembered for her contributions to the University community. No portion of her gift was used in the construction of the building.¹⁴⁷ In the latest version of *The Drawl*, the official history and traditions handbook for the university, the Southern Miss community can find a brief biography detailing her contributions to the university in the “Notable Alumni” section of the handbook as she received an honorary doctorate degree from the University in 1998.¹⁴⁸ In 2019, McCarty’s house on Miller Street in downtown Hattiesburg to the Sixth Street Museum District by the Hattiesburg Convention Commission. The Sixth Street Museum District was created to preserve and celebrate the rich African American history that exists in the city, and McCarty’s house now-turned museum sits between the Eureka School and the African American Military History Museum.¹⁴⁹

Oseola McCarty is cemented in public memory at Southern Miss as a resilient and humble washerwoman who donated a portion of her life savings to USM to provide opportunities for students in her community to go to college and receive an education not afforded to her. This popular narrative is one of many interwoven strands fabricating a diverse tapestry of both recognized and silenced narratives of McCarty’s life and their impact on the university. Over time, however, institutionalized racism within the university community has silenced elements of McCarty’s legacy in ways that have omitted parts of her story. The opportunity to capitalize on McCarty’s contributions through new directions in the USM Foundation’s outreach and fundraising efforts, have

¹⁴⁷ Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

¹⁴⁸ Southern Miss Alumni Association, *The Drawl*, 68.

¹⁴⁹ Lici Beveridge, “Oseola McCarty House Makes the Move to Museum Row to Preserve the Washerwoman’s Legacy,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 30, 2019.

produced gaps in the narrative surrounding McCarty's intentions with her contribution. At the same time, the national attention her story gained through a series of obscure media events has informed and given power to an incomplete narrative. Peeling back these inconsistencies within McCarty's history and popular memory reveals how a mid-major university in the Deep South grapples with ever-evolving institutional operations related to fundraising and campus life through the lens of race. USM adopted McCarty's story to carefully craft a national perception of Southern Miss as a racially progressive and inclusive institution in both Mississippi and the Deep South. Because Southern Miss is a public institution that serves as a cultural center for the campus community, it also must work to create environments that welcome racial belonging for students and university stakeholders. McCarty's historical memory and gift have aided in advancing student recruitment efforts through scholarship endowments aimed at attracting minority students, vastly reshaped the structure and strategy of fundraising efforts through the USM Foundation and helped advance the university's goal of becoming the "University for the New South."

While current historiography places Southern Miss history within a variety of different contexts, McCarty's story has been used in ways that she was never afforded the opportunity to see in her lifetime. As a result, an incomplete and often simplistic narrative of McCarty dominates her historical legacy at Southern Miss through physical monuments, media portrayal, and published history.¹⁵⁰ Although most current Southern Miss presentations of McCarty's historical narrative begin at the end of her life, telling her story from the beginning reveals gaps in her historical narrative. These gaps silence

¹⁵⁰ Morgan, *Treasured Past, Golden Future*, 194-195

parts of her narrative that depict her as a hardworking and generous woman. While current representations of her historical memory identify and prioritize these characteristics, they fail to place them within her specific life circumstances. This chapter argues that while Southern Miss is often presented in the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning narrative as a university eager to highlight traditions of diversity, progressivism, and a welcoming campus culture, it often aligns with other universities in the state and region under-representing race in its construction of public history and memory.

Oseola McCarty was born on March 7, 1908 in Wayne County, Mississippi in the town near Shubuta, Mississippi, and was the only child to Lucy McCarty.¹⁵¹ She did not move to Hattiesburg until 1916 when her grandmother bought a seven-acre truck farm that supplied most of the family's food and surplus.¹⁵² McCarty attended Eureka Elementary School until the sixth grade. She left school to help care for her ill aunt and did not go back to school. She began washing and ironing clothes full time with her grandmother and continued the work for the rest of her life until arthritis in her hands and wrists forced her to retire at the age of 87. Over the course of her life, McCarty lived modestly, choosing to save the money that she earned. McCarty never married or had children but displayed a deep love for students and serving the community. Overall, the historical memory of McCarty's life presents a hardworking woman with a strong dedication to providing for those around her.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Walton, Oral history with Miss Oseola McCarty, 1.

¹⁵² Walton, Miss Oseola McCarty, 1.

¹⁵³ Walton, Miss Oseola McCarty, 1.

However, the development of her character can be connected back to her family history before she was born. In her oral history, McCarty explained that her mother was raped by her “daddy” and “that’s the reason I was here.”¹⁵⁴ Her mother was traveling by herself through a patch of woods on the way to take care of her sick grandmother, when McCarty’s father jumped out from behind an oak tree and raped her mother.¹⁵⁵ Because of this, McCarty was ultimately raised by both her mother and grandmother. However, after her mother married, McCarty’s grandmother took care of her because her mother traveled with her husband to different turpentine camps across the state. Not until the death of her aunt did McCarty learn that she was the child of a rape. She explained, “[m]y people wouldn’t tell me nothing about it until—I’ll tell you, I learned this after my aunt died.”¹⁵⁶ When asked about why she did not ask her family about the rape or about her father, McCarty explained that she, “never did ask her nothing like that because I didn’t know what to do with it.”¹⁵⁷

The quiet life that her grandmother lived while working hard to raise and support her taught McCarty that choosing to live life without knowing or understanding circumstances helps someone move past the painful and uncontrollable situations in life. McCarty was taught early in her childhood how to live her life not knowing but also not letting the unknown affect her outlook on the things that mattered the most. This often-overlooked aspect of McCarty’s life demonstrates her ability to compartmentalize life circumstances so they would not interfere with her work.

¹⁵⁴ Walton, Miss Oseola McCarty, 4.

¹⁵⁵ Walton, Miss Oseola McCarty, 4.

¹⁵⁶ Walton, Miss Oseola McCarty, 4.

¹⁵⁷ Walton, Miss Oseola McCarty, 5.

Examining McCarty's own understanding of her family history and relationships with her parents suggests that she lived a mostly private life reflected the significance of her work, family, and faith through her actions. Every family member that positively impacted her relied on their work to provide for her, and she wanted to do the same thing to provide for herself later in life. For instance, her oral history mentioned that "now, when I was little, everything I'd see my mother and them do—they'd wash and iron for people—and when I got big enough I'd wash and iron, too, just like they did."¹⁵⁸ Understanding that McCarty modeled most of her life and work habits after those that raised her provides a deeper insight into McCarty's character that historiography falls short in covering.

This gap in the narrative of McCarty's early life and the beginning of her career is clearly present, and it is impossible to uncover when simply surveying her impact on USM history. For USM history, it became much easier to appeal to different interest groups within a university community such as students, faculty, administration, donors, and other financial stakeholders. To Southern Miss, not including McCarty's family history when presenting her narrative within the context of her financial contributions to the university is irrelevant because it does not affect the overall impact of her story. At the very least, if Southern Miss were to dedicate part of the presentation of her life story to the work ethics of her mother and grandmother, the heroine impact of McCarty's story could be downplayed in the public memory, though the narrative would be more relatable for members of the community.

¹⁵⁸ Walton, Miss Oseola McCarty, 22.

In 1916, McCarty relocated to Hattiesburg with her grandmother to move away from the farm work that existed in Shubata. In Hattiesburg, there was a large need for domestic workers in the homes and the city saw a rise in the number of African American families moving to Hattiesburg to find work in these jobs. Originally, when they arrived in Hattiesburg, her grandmother did not find work, but according to McCarty's oral history, "they found out they could do work. And they were just overwhelmed with work. People just loved to work. They started washing and ironing."¹⁵⁹ McCarty and her grandmother moved to Hattiesburg during the height of the city's urban development and during a decade that saw a boom in the domestic service job industry in Mississippi for black women. By 1910, about fifteen percent of all employed black women in Mississippi were working in domestic service jobs such as cooks, nannies, maids, washerwomen, and general maids.¹⁶⁰ While these jobs were often physically demanding and required more emotional investment for black women because they worked in the homes of white people, they provided a way to escape the confines of farm labor and the trappings of sharecropping in the South.¹⁶¹ Over the course of the first few decades of the twentieth century, the demand for domestic household workers grew exponentially, and McCarty eventually found herself following in the footsteps not just of her grandmother and aunt, but also of thousands of other black women seeking to provide for their families. While her grandmother found work as a laundress, McCarty began going to the Eureka School at the age of ten.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Walton, Miss Oseola McCarty, 18.

¹⁶⁰ Sturkey, *Hattiesburg: An American City in Black and White*, 82.

¹⁶¹ Sturkey, *Hattiesburg*, 82.

¹⁶² Walton, Miss Oseola McCarty, 19.

Founded in 1918 and built as a singular red frame building that McCarty would later describe as “a little red school,” it was the first school for African Americans in Hattiesburg. While the state of Mississippi spent, on average, half the national average per pupil on school expenditures for students, African Americans were clearly disadvantaged by the lack of educational opportunities in the state and often received less support from the state. Over time, Hattiesburg grew to have one of the best educational systems for African Americans in Mississippi, and McCarty had the opportunity to take advantage of that from an early age.¹⁶³ Over the course of the twentieth century, the Eureka School became a symbol of opportunity and racial uplift for the Mobile Street community in Hattiesburg, and the Eureka School shaped McCarty’s life experiences because the supportive community felt like home.

McCarty’s deep passion for education extended far past her inability to earn a high school diploma, eventually creating within her a desire to provide access to a college education for students who looked like her. McCarty grew up with an inextinguishable passion for classroom learning and took advantage of the opportunity to attend school when she could. Before starting primary school at Eureka School, she went to school with her Aunt Evelyn in Shubuta, Mississippi. McCarty recounted that when she was a young girl, there was no one to care for her while her grandmother was working on the farm. Her aunt Evelyn, who at the time was still a teenager attending high school, carried her to school with her every day with the permission of the superintendent and cared for her.¹⁶⁴ Though she was clearly not old enough to attend school, she spent her time there with her

¹⁶³ Sturkey, *Hattiesburg*, 186.

¹⁶⁴ Walton, Miss Oseola McCarty, 20.

aunt listening to class and going outside to play by herself. When asked about whether she disturbed the class by being there at a young age, McCarty answered, “[n]o I didn’t. I was quiet. I always have been quiet, and still quiet.”¹⁶⁵ McCarty’s encounters with education in her early years demonstrate her passion for learning. Later in her life, when reflecting on her family’s experiences with education, she stated that most of her relatives, particularly her uncles, did not have opportunities to gain an education. In fact, many of them were conditioned to go to work as soon as possible and were only taught to read and write.¹⁶⁶ For McCarty, subconsciously taking advantage of the ability to go to school meant breaking the barrier of education for her family and blazing a trail for others to follow.

Official university publications and media do not mention McCarty’s early education before she decided to leave school to care for her ill aunt. In many cases, they have bypassed this section of her narrative to place more significance on McCarty’s financial contributions to the university following her retirement. Presenting McCarty’s connection to education in this condensed style silences McCarty’s personal connection to her passion for learning. As a result, the public is left with an incomplete depiction of McCarty’s character and overall vision for the importance of education, especially for African American students. An incomplete presentation of McCarty’s narrative can best be seen in the USM Foundations press release regarding the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration of Oseola McCarty’s establishment of an educational trust fund at Southern Miss. In a news article published in 2020, McCarty, “knew the importance of education,”

¹⁶⁵ Walton, Miss Oseola McCarty, 21.

¹⁶⁶ Walton, Miss Oseola McCarty, 34.

though she had never seen the Southern Miss campus nor had any connection to higher education.¹⁶⁷ In the same way, the “About Oseola McCarty” webpage sharing information about the Oseola McCarty Program and Scholarship failed to provide details about McCarty’s connection to education outside of the established trust fund and scholarship program.¹⁶⁸ Instead, the publication offered a quote from McCarty that connected to the importance of receiving an education to her giving. The quote reads “some child can get their education, to help them along, because you can’t do nothing now unless you get your education. I don’t regret one single penny I gave to the College. My only regret is that I didn’t have more to give.”¹⁶⁹ It is also worth noting that this quote directly precedes the section of the publication titled “Help Celebrate and Join McCarty’s Legacy!” a section that urged the public to contribute to the Oseola McCarty Scholarship Endowment to invest in providing opportunities for higher education for students who might not would have access to a college education otherwise.

McCarty’s words suggest that Southern Miss chose to illustrate McCarty’s connection to education with her donation. However, her connection runs deeper and more personal, and the USM Foundation’s choice to silence this aspect of her narrative demonstrates a subconscious yet calculated appeal to foundation fundraising using pointed messages designed to inspire the public to insert themselves into the story and legacy of Oseola McCarty. The USM Foundation does this to reach more people with their fundraising efforts and to appeal to potential donors. Quite simply, it is easier for

¹⁶⁷ Pitts, “USM Foundation Honors Oseola McCarty’s Life and Legacy,” The University of Southern Mississippi,” October 8, 2020.

¹⁶⁸ USM Foundation, “About Oseola McCarty.”

¹⁶⁹ USM Foundation, “About Oseola McCarty.”

people to connect to a message centered around providing opportunities for students to access education rather than an idea deeply rooted in someone's personal connections to education that may not be applicable to all life experiences. Omitting parts of McCarty's narrative is an effort by USM to silence some of the uncomfortable parts of the university history that include racism and segregation. While appealing to the masses when presenting an institution's historical narrative is common to satisfy all circles of influence within a university community, doing so negatively impacts the public memory by silencing often marginalized perspectives.¹⁷⁰ In the case of Oseola McCarty, silencing specific parts of her narrative benefits Southern Miss because it provides more room to frame her public memory in ways that will appeal to more university stakeholders. This can further be seen by examining McCarty's decision to leave school and enter the workforce early in her life despite her proven love for learning.

McCarty's experience with education was cut short in the sixth grade when she left school to care for her ill aunt. According to the USM Foundation, McCarty, "left school in the sixth grade to care for her ill aunt, and never made it back to the classroom."¹⁷¹ While this element of her past is true and serves its purpose within the context of the publication, McCarty's transition from full-time student to full-time washerwoman is far deeper and more complex than Southern Miss and the USM Foundation presents. When McCarty was in sixth grade, her Aunt Evelyn, the same aunt that took her to school with her in Shubuta, was diagnosed with a fibrous tumor in her stomach. After consulting with multiple doctors, Aunt Evelyn had the tumor removed.

¹⁷⁰ Hutcheson, *A People's History of American Higher Education*, 9.

¹⁷¹ Pitts, "USM Foundation Honors Oseola McCarty's Life and Legacy" The University of Southern Mississippi.

Because Aunt Evelyn did not have any children of her own to take care of her while she recovered and the rest of the grandchildren were boys that had to work, McCarty was the only girl in the family with the ability to stay with her in the recovery stage. In her oral history, she admitted, “I was the only girl to stay with her and so the rest of them boys. And so, I was the one to stay with her and that’s how I come to drop out of school.”¹⁷² Though McCarty left school to care for Aunt Evelyn, she was only bedridden for about a month, meaning that McCarty had the opportunity to go back to school once Aunt Evelyn healed from her surgery. However, McCarty chose not to go back to school because she would have been held back a grade which would have caused her to be left behind by the classmates she grew up with.

There were many people in McCarty’s circle of influence who encouraged her to go back to school, especially Miss Ola Garroway. McCarty’s grandmother worked for Miss Garroway, and she encouraged McCarty to go back to school and get her education because there were many non-traditional age students attending school to receive an education. Despite encouragement from Miss Garroway and others, McCarty, did not see it like that. She did not want to go back to school because she felt like she would have been left behind by her old classmates that she spent lunch and break time with.¹⁷³ Ultimately, McCarty decided not going back to school was the best decision for her because she did not want to feel left behind by her friends that she had to leave when caring for Aunt Evelyn. As a preteen, McCarty chose her interpersonal relationships over

¹⁷² Walton, Miss Oseola McCarty, 40.

¹⁷³ Walton, Miss Oseola McCarty, 42.

an opportunity to finish her education at one of the best schools for African Americans in Mississippi.

McCarty's reasoning for choosing not to go back to school offers an interesting yet confusing twist to her historical narrative. Though McCarty later said that she regretted not going back to school and finishing her diploma, one can only imagine how drastically different her Southern Miss narrative and public memory would have been. As for her current public memory, this element of her story is only found in her oral history and not presented in any elements of Southern Miss's memorialization of her. By intentionally silencing this thread of her narrative, Southern Miss further enhances its own interests in using the unknowingly incomplete story to portray McCarty as a valiant servant willing to sacrifice her dreams to help others' dreams come true. While this characterization is not false, it is supported by half-truths within a larger narrative that offers a simplistic view of her relationship with education. Her awareness of her own life circumstances and commitment to contributing to the future generations of students consciously drove her work ethic as a washerwoman for decades.

For seventy years, McCarty washed and ironed clothes for many of Hattiesburg's white families. Initially, she worked alongside her grandmother, aunt, and mother to wash and iron, learning the skill of handwashing clothes to meet the specific needs of customers. After her grandmother passed away, she used these acquired skills to build a long-lasting clientele with her mom and aunt that carried her through her work as a washerwoman until 1995.¹⁷⁴ With each load of clothes that her clients brought to her house, McCarty washed by hand on a washboard, boiled in a large washpot, and rinsed

¹⁷⁴ Walton, Miss Oseola McCarty, 1.

the clothes at least four times before hanging them out to air dry using the fresh breeze.¹⁷⁵

If a client requested that their clothes be ironed she “tried to iron the best she could” and

“not leave wrinkles in your clothes and try to keep your clothes white and pretty.”¹⁷⁶

McCarty describes in her oral history that while the process of handwashing, hang drying, and ironing clothes was arduous, she preferred handwashing over the washing machine because, “They just didn’t rinse enough for me. And they had a funny odor to them.”¹⁷⁷ She charged between one dollar and fifty cents and two dollars for each load, depending on the size and charged extra for ironing. While this seemed like a menial amount to charge for intensive labor, over time, McCarty built her savings using this income by living modestly and working until arthritis throughout her body forced her into retirement.¹⁷⁸

As seen in the earlier years of her life, McCarty valued education and wanted to see future generations of students that “looked like her” could receive an education. When asked about McCarty’s commitment to education, Paul Laughlin, McCarty’s financial advisor at Trustmark Bank, recounted her passion for this vision. He noted that throughout her life as she sat on the front porch, she witnessed generations of students walk past her house on Miller Street on their way to the high school down the road.¹⁷⁹ According to Laughlin, seeing African American students going to school mattered to her, and she wanted to use her resources to make a difference. In fact, her initial idea to help students was to “do something for the high school,” until she was told that students

¹⁷⁵ Walton, Miss Oseola McCarty, 47.

¹⁷⁶ Walton, Miss Oseola McCarty, 47.

¹⁷⁷ Walton, Miss Oseola McCarty, 48.

¹⁷⁸ USM Foundation, “About Oseola McCarty.”

¹⁷⁹ Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

went to high school for free.¹⁸⁰ In many ways, Southern Miss captures this element of her character in the public memory and narrative. For instance, a news publication detailing the unveiling of the Oseola McCarty statue in Shoemaker Square stated that “McCarty knew the importance of an education and wanted to help students in her community.”¹⁸¹ Additionally, the 2019 version of *The Drawl*, notes that McCarty’s contributions to Southern Miss would go to provide scholarships for students that demonstrated financial need.¹⁸² While these statements about McCarty often precede the details of her “unexpected gift” to Southern Miss and serve as a complete justification for her decision in the historical narrative, her decision to invest in students at Southern Miss was rather one that was heavily advised by her financial advisors. The effect that the act had on Southern Miss was unexpected both by the university and McCarty.

Although McCarty’s contributions to Southern Miss came as a surprise to the university and Hattiesburg community, the instant attention that she received in the last years of her life and the recognition and fame that has dominated the perception of her in the public memory was not something she or anyone close to her anticipated. Rather, the series of reactionary events that took place following the establishment of her trust fund with Southern Miss combined with the university’s attempts to protect McCarty from being taken advantage of by the media represents Southern Miss’s efforts to shape her legacy. According to Laughlin, McCarty never set out to become the largest black donor in Southern Miss history¹⁸³ Rather, if you asked her later in life what she envisioned her

¹⁸⁰ Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

¹⁸¹ Pitts, “USM Foundation Honors Oseola McCarty’s Life and Legacy”

¹⁸² Southern Miss Alumni Association, *The Drawl: The History and Traditions Handbook of The University of Southern Mississippi*, 68.

¹⁸³ Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

future to entail, she would not have been able to give a concrete answer. McCarty saw herself working and saving money for as long as she could.¹⁸⁴ For her, retirement was not an option, and above all, one of the few things that she was certain about was that she wanted to “help the children.”¹⁸⁵ McCarty’s world revolved around her family, faith, and work, and at the end of her life she was sure to contribute of her savings to each of these areas. However, when certain family members such as her grandmother and mother died, and her relationship with other members of her family became strained, McCarty shifted her focus to giving back to her church, the few family members that she kept in touch with, and her vision to invest in education in whatever way she could.

While the public memory and current memorialization of her life portrays the establishment of her trust fund with the USM Foundation as a conscious decision to invest part of her life savings and cement her legacy as a generous benefactor, current presentations of how she settled on contributing to Southern Miss displays a slightly different narrative. First, McCarty had no realistic perspective on the amount of money that she had saved over her life. When recounting how McCarty’s trust fund was established with Southern Miss, Laughlin often told people who asked if McCarty knew how much money she had in her savings that the questions was one that he could not understand because McCarty had a narrow and simplistic understanding of money.¹⁸⁶ To McCarty, according to Laughlin, the dollar amount that her savings totaled did not translate into tangible principles of what her money could buy.¹⁸⁷ Though she could read

¹⁸⁴ Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

¹⁸⁵ Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

¹⁸⁶ Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

¹⁸⁷ Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

her bank statements and saw the amount of money that was she had saved, the massive sum did not affect the way that she lived her life.

Over the course of her life, as McCarty saved her money, she placed various amounts of her savings into certificate of deposits (CDs) at Trustmark and other banks in the area. By 1995, several of those CDs became past due and were no longer gaining interest. One day when McCarty came to the bank, a customer service representative informed her that she needed to update her CDs. She spoke to Nancy Oats, a former customer service representative that had worked with McCarty but had transitioned to the trust department.¹⁸⁸ Laughlin was working in the trust department of Trustmark when Nancy Oats referred McCarty to him, and claimed that he suggested to her that she establish a trust with the bank so that the bank managed all of her financial assets.¹⁸⁹ At the time, she was falling behind on some of her bills, and Laughlin ensured her that the bank would take care of all of her bills and ensure that her money was invested in all the places she wished for it to be. McCarty knew she wanted to invest part of her savings into education for children to go to college. However, she had never attended college much less seen the campus of one. When McCarty expressed interest in establishing a trust with Southern Miss, she did not know the name of the institution. She simply told him that she wanted to give money to “the college out there.”¹⁹⁰ Only when Laughlin had to inquire about which school she was referring to, either Southern Miss or William Carey University, did McCarty tell him that she wanted to give money to “the one on Hardy

¹⁸⁸ Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

¹⁸⁹ Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

¹⁹⁰ Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

Street.”¹⁹¹ At the time that she established the trust fund with The University of Southern Mississippi, she had not seen campus, and would not visit campus until months later when University President Aubrey Lucas invited her to the 1995 fall commencement ceremony to honor her for her contributions to Southern Miss.¹⁹²

The fact that McCarty had never visited the campus before she created the fund is mentioned in publications detailing the USM Foundation’s unveiling of the Oseola McCarty statute in 2020, but it is mentioned in the same sentence acknowledging McCarty’s dedication to education.¹⁹³ The publication featured on the university website states “though she never set foot on USM’s Hattiesburg campus before 1995, McCarty knew the importance of an education and wanted to help students in her community.” The official university history written by Chester Morgan minimizes McCarty’s lack of knowledge about Southern Miss as the time that she established the trust fund with the university.¹⁹⁴ Rather, the four included pages simply detail McCarty’s life, contributions to the university, and instant nationwide fame. Morgan’s presentation of McCarty’s narrative briefly mentions that she had never visited campus prior to her contributions suggesting, “though she had never lived in Hattiesburg for more than three-quarters of a century, she had never before been on campus.”¹⁹⁵ Instead, the narrative that is presented about McCarty emphasizes both the process that McCarty and Laughlin used to allocate the portion of her estate to Southern Miss and the unexpected impact that her actions had on the university at the time. At the same time, Morgan’s presentation of how McCarty

¹⁹¹ Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

¹⁹² Morgan, *Treasured Past, Golden Future*, 196.

¹⁹³ Pitts, “USM Foundation Honors Oseola McCarty’s Life and Legacy.”

¹⁹⁴ Morgan, *Treasured Past, Golden Future*, 196.

¹⁹⁵ Morgan, *Treasured Past, Golden Future*, 196.

decided that Southern Miss students would benefit from her life savings offers a slightly different narrative than Laughlin offered in his oral history that also featured Dr. J.T. Tisdale and David Tisdale. For instance, Morgan chose to include a quote from Laughlin regarding McCarty's decision to designate part of her life savings to Southern Miss revealing that "she said she wanted to leave the bulk of her money to USM... and she didn't want [anybody] to change her mind."¹⁹⁶ Morgan includes in his version of McCarty's narrative a quote from Laughlin that stated, "she reached out to help, and by helping she became a star."¹⁹⁷ From this quote, it is clear that McCarty was very knowledgeable about Southern Miss and had made a thoughtful, calculated, and predetermined decision to leave part of her estate to a trust that would fund scholarships for Southern Miss. This contradicts Laughlin's previous quote stating that McCarty had to be reminded the name of Southern Miss, and the comparison between the two quotes demonstrates how emphasizing different aspects of a historical narrative leaves room for people to have differing interpretations of events, legacies that are left, and ways that people are memorialized within a broader historical narrative.

Because historians have learned that when people participate in interviews for oral histories that they often subconsciously place themselves at the center of the narrative as a mode for exerting power and ownership of their own unique experiences, it is reasonable to infer that Laughlin unintentionally emphasized this historical moment in his recollection of how McCarty came to organizing her estate to include Southern

¹⁹⁶ Morgan, *Treasured Past, Golden Future*, 194.

¹⁹⁷ Morgan, *Treasured Past, Golden Future*, 196.

Miss.¹⁹⁸ This presentation of McCarty's story reveals a more relatable narrative that allows people, especially university stakeholders, to connect McCarty's personal life narrative to university history as an extension of Southern Miss' history. By characterizing McCarty's trust fund as historic for the university because at the time her contributions to the university were the first of its kind that the USM Foundation had seen, this presentation represents the power and control that Southern Miss has over its own public history and memory that is associated with the university at the expense of others. McCarty's generosity changed the narratives of Black students looking to attend Southern Miss more than it changed the actual university though Southern Miss interpretations of McCarty's life suggest the opposite. Choosing to centralize the details of McCarty's lack of a true connection to Southern Miss would have altered public memory of her by making her actions seem less intentional than they were. Instead, the historical memory of McCarty and Southern Miss emphasized the almost instant worldwide attention she received because of her gift. An examination of this narrative reveals that McCarty's donation was less of a gift and more of a mutually beneficial trust fund agreement.

When referencing Oseola McCarty in Southern Miss history, many versions of her public memory refer to her financial contributions as a gift to the university. An article featured in the 1995-1996 USM Foundation Annual Report *A Quest for Distinction* titled "Oseola McCarty's Gift Keeps Right on Giving" states that "no other event in the history of the University of Southern Mississippi has captured hearts around

¹⁹⁸ Anna Katharina Maerker, Simon Sleight, and Adam Sutcliffe, *History, Memory, and Public Life: The Past in the Present*, (Routledge Press, 2018), 11.

the world the way Oseola McCarty's gift has done."¹⁹⁹ Similarly, when President Lucas invited McCarty to the 1995 university fall commencement ceremony, he declared, "I don't know that I have ever been touched by a gift to the university as I am this one."²⁰⁰ Not only do countless newspaper articles call McCarty's trust fund a gift such as one from the Southern Miss 1995 *Student Printz*, but also McCarty has been associated with a gift in various poems, songs, and other expressions of creative forms of public memory.²⁰¹ For example, a poem written by Marvin S. Shannon titled "The Gift" commemorates McCarty's life and actions and ends with the line, "When all the praises are said and done, you are the GIFT, you... SEE."²⁰²

However, according to Paul Laughlin, there is a false narrative being presented when the word gift is used to refer to McCarty's trust fund with the university, so much so that he stated that he felt a "moral imperative" to point out the incorrect use of the word.²⁰³ To Laughlin, a gift is a present conveyance of resources, and under this meaning, McCarty's trust was not technically a gift and that this historical fact is one that is little remarked upon in the historical memory of the trust fund that McCarty established.²⁰⁴ Rather, when Laughlin and McCarty created the trust documents, they added a clause stating that McCarty could revoke the trust from the university at any given moment, something almost never publicized.²⁰⁵ In fact, Morgan wrote in his

¹⁹⁹ The USM Foundation, "Oseola McCarty's Gift Keeps Right on Giving."

²⁰⁰ Morgan, *Treasured Past, Golden Future*, 196.

²⁰¹ David Alan Planchet, "News of McCarty's Gift Makes Global News," *Student Printz*, September 7, 1995.

²⁰² Marvin S. Shannon, "The Gift," September 1, 1995, M442, Box 1, Folder 2, Oseola McCarty Collection, Special Collections, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries

²⁰³ Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

²⁰⁴ Arnold An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

²⁰⁵ Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

official history of Southern Miss that, “Laughlin had made arrangements for 60 percent of her estate to be placed in an irrevocable trust administered by the USM Foundation.”²⁰⁶ Another little known fact about the trust was that none of McCarty’s initial trust money went to the university until after she passed away in 1999. The incorrect association of McCarty’s Southern Miss trust with a gift illustrates how the slight modification of historical fact can have major implications that alter McCarty’s public memory and how she is memorialized. Referring to the trust as a gift emphasizes McCarty’s generosity to the university rather than the long-term investment that she made to provide opportunities for black students to attend college. Doing this places Southern Miss alongside McCarty in the historical memory of the narrative and characterizes McCarty more as a generous benefactor to the university than an intentional investor in a cause that she was passionate about. At the same time, referring to McCarty’s trust as a gift erases the idea that the trust was a mutually beneficial financial investment that allowed McCarty to both contribute to her family and church and contribute to her passion for education. Because of this oversimplification of her actions, McCarty’s legacy is reduced to fall under the dictation of the Southern Miss narrative in the same way that a smaller Russian nesting doll can be masked by the larger one on top of it.

Although historiography surrounding the development of public memory states that historical narratives can change over time depending on a variety of factors such as individual memory development, political motives, and changes in popular culture or technology, the characterization of McCarty’s trust to Southern Miss as a gift is a

²⁰⁶ Morgan, *Treasured Past, Golden Future*, 196.

narrative that was produced only a few days after McCarty finalized the trust.²⁰⁷ This seemingly harmless characterization by Sharon Wertz, an editorial page editor for the local *Hattiesburg American* newspaper, caused McCarty's story to gain national attention and fame that ultimately altered the public memory of her narrative. When Paul Laughlin met with McCarty to discuss how to allocate her estate, he placed ten dimes on his desk to represent each tenth of the amount of her estate and asked her how she wanted to divide her estate.²⁰⁸ From there, McCarty designated parts of her estate to three of her cousins and her church, leaving six dimes left to allocate for college scholarships for students at Southern Miss.²⁰⁹ According to Laughlin, the value of her estate came to be about \$250,000, and \$150,000 of that was placed in an irrevocable trust that was to be executed by the USM Foundation.²¹⁰

Once the legal documents were drafted and signed, Laughlin claimed that he called Bill Pace from the USM Foundation, to notify him of McCarty's trust with the university.²¹¹ When Laughlin explained to Pace that McCarty was set to give 60-percent of her estate or \$150,000 to the university, Pace initially minimized the gravity of McCarty's contributions stating, "Oh, we've got people (who) have a lot larger funds than that."²¹² However, two days later, Pace reached back out to Laughlin regarding McCarty's trust. Pace explained that when he was talking to President Lucas about McCarty's trust, they realized that while they had donors who had funds that were bigger

²⁰⁷ Maerker, Sleight, and Sutcliffe, *History, Memory, and Public Life: The Past in the Present*, 1.

²⁰⁸ Morgan, *Treasured Past, Golden Future*, 196.

²⁰⁹ Walton, Oral history with Miss Oseola McCarty, 88.

²¹⁰ Morgan, *Treasured Past, Golden Future*, 196.

²¹¹ Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

²¹² Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

than McCarty's, that they did not, "have funds from black donors that are bigger than that."²¹³ Pace went on to explain that because it was so rare for a washerwoman to amass an estate of that size and to want to donate it to Southern Miss, Dr. Lucas wanted to meet McCarty. On a Wednesday, July 26, Dr. Lucas invited McCarty and Laughlin to his house for lunch.²¹⁴ Dr. Lucas also invited Sharon Wertz from the *Hattiesburg American*, and afterward she interviewed McCarty while a photographer from USM took a picture. The following Sunday, on July 30, 1995, the *Hattiesburg American* published an article titled, "Local woman makes 'extraordinary' donation to USM" on the front page of the newspaper.²¹⁵ Within the article, Wertz stated that "McCarty's gift establishes an endowed Oseola McCarty Scholarship" and, "McCarty's gift has astounded even those who believe they know her well."²¹⁶ The article, published less than a week following the official establishment of her trust, was the first time McCarty's trust was defined as a gift. The article went on to give a detailed biography of her life as well as a synopsis of how she came to donate the bulk of her life savings to Southern Miss. At that moment, the article also represented the first time that her story was publicized. The piece indicated that though in most cases the bank kept client financial records of this type confidential, Laughlin asked McCarty for permission to publicize the story because of its uniqueness.²¹⁷

²¹³ Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

²¹⁴ Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

²¹⁵ Sharon Wertz, "Local Woman Makes 'extraordinary' Donation to USM," *Hattiesburg American*, July 30, 1995.

²¹⁶ Wertz, "Local Woman Makes 'extraordinary' Donation to USM."

²¹⁷ Wertz, "Local Woman Makes 'extraordinary' Donation to USM."

Because Dr. Lucas invited Sharon Wertz to interview McCarty at his house, the university, then, wanted to share McCarty's story to the local Hattiesburg community to be commemorated. At the same time, however, these acts Pace and Dr. Lucas represented a conscious choice by the institution to use McCarty's narrative to also bring attention to Southern Miss and the USM Foundation. Because McCarty was a black woman, her desire to give part of her life savings to a predominately white institution represented an opportunity for the university to use her story to present Southern Miss as a welcoming and inclusive institution. Had McCarty been a white woman, it seems plausible that her story would not have been publicized in the same way. For example, in the article published by Wertz, Bill Pace noted that, "this is by far the largest gift ever given to USM by an African American."²¹⁸ By publicizing this fact and making it the basis for defining the narrative, Southern Miss communicated a new interpretation of the public memory of McCarty's story that emphasized race and gender. When this collective memory of McCarty eventually spread across the country, it extinguished narratives that emphasized other characteristics about McCarty such as her work ethic and modest style of living.

Though her story was published in the Hattiesburg American for all people in the local community to read and celebrate, McCarty's story gained national media attention after Paul Harvey, an American radio broadcaster for ABC News Radio, featured Oseola McCarty and her trust with Southern Miss in an episode of his radio show, *The Rest of the Story*. This well-known radio program ran Monday through Friday beginning on May 10, 1976 and consisted of stories obscure subjects or people where one element of the

²¹⁸ Wertz, "Local Woman Makes 'extraordinary' Donation to USM."

story was held back until the end of the broadcast.²¹⁹ According to Laughlin, Harvey had a group of journalists comb through local newspapers searching for stories that could be featured in the broadcasts.²²⁰ The week following Wertz's *Hattiesburg American* article, *The Rest of the Story* aired a program episode titled, "Oseola McCarty (Washer woman gave \$150,000 for scholarships)."²²¹ In the episode, Harvey detailed McCarty's life, beginning with her retirement and spiraling back through her life story. He highlighted her modest lifestyle and worth ethic with points such as, "[w]hen shoes did not fit her right, she would cut the toes out of the shoes" or "[w]hen window air conditioners became affordable, she relied on an ancient electronic fan to stir the leaden air atmosphere through Mississippi's dog days."²²² At the end of the broadcast, Harvey explained that McCarty took the money she saved over the course of her life and gave it to the University of Southern Mississippi "[t]o finance scholarships for black students." In turn, "under a special trust agreement, her own modest financial needs would be met for the rest of her life."²²³

In the week following the airing of the Harvey's radio broadcast, McCarty's story received national attention and reporters from major media outlets such as NBC and ABC flocked to Hattiesburg, Mississippi to interview McCarty and members of the university community.²²⁴ Major newspapers like *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*

²¹⁹ "The "Paul Harvey's The Rest of the Story - Oseola McCarty (Wash Woman Gave \$150,000 for Scholarships)," *ABC News Radio*, 1995, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgGI1Zc27bQ.of the Story](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgGI1Zc27bQ.of%20the%20Story)."

²²⁰ Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

²²¹ Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

²²² "Paul Harvey's The Rest of the Story - Oseola McCarty (Wash Woman Gave \$150,000 for Scholarships)."

²²³ "Paul Harvey's The Rest of the Story - Oseola McCarty (Wash Woman Gave \$150,000 for Scholarships)."

²²⁴ Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

featured articles detailing McCarty's donation to USM, and cities from Jackson, Mississippi to Austin, Texas to Tacoma, Washington had local newspapers with McCarty on the front page. In a span of a week, Oseola McCarty had gone from a retired Hattiesburg washerwoman to a national celebrity and inspiration to others. Reporters from major news outlets flocked to Hattiesburg to interview McCarty, and recognitions began pouring for the little washerwoman from Mississippi.²²⁵ Paul Laughlin both shared and witnessed the national attention McCarty received over less than a week stating that, "[b]y Friday, there were people knocking at my door. There was Kenzie Jones from NBC that wanted to come and meet me, and to be straightforward the bank told me not to talk to any of these national news people."²²⁶ McCarty was featured on *ABC*'s "Good Morning America," and her story was featured on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). In just over a month from the finalization of her trust with Southern Miss, she made appearances on *CNN*, *BET*, and several other television shows.²²⁷ McCarty and Stephanie Bullock, the first student to receive a scholarship from her donation, were also featured in *People Magazine*.²²⁸

Following her contribution to Southern Miss and its ensuing national recognition, McCarty spent the remaining years of her life traveling the country to make media appearances and receive awards honoring her generosity and service to the university and higher education. She received over forty awards over the span of her life including the Wallenburg Humanitarian Award, the Community Heroes Award of the National Urban

²²⁵ Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

²²⁶ Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

²²⁷ David Alan Planchet, "News of McCarty's Gift Makes Global News," *Student Printz*, The University of Southern Mississippi, September 7, 1995.

²²⁸ Planchet, "News of McCarty's Gift Makes Global News."

League, and the Avicenna Medal presented by UNESCO.²²⁹ Most notably, in September 1995, President Bill Clinton awarded McCarty with the Presidential Citizens Medal, an award that is often considered the nation's second highest civilian honor.²³⁰ In a letter to McCarty, he wrote, "Your unselfish deed is a remarkable example of the spirit and ingenuity that has made America great."²³¹

At the same time, the University of Southern Mississippi, an otherwise unknown mid-size university in the heart of the Deep South also began to receive national attention because of McCarty. Not only was University president Dr. Aubrey Lucas featured in the media to represent Southern Miss as recipient of McCarty's trust, but he also began to receive letters from university leadership across the country praising the university for its leadership and McCarty for her gratitude. In one letter to Lucas, Vice Chancellor of Undergraduate Education at Indiana University-Purdue University J. Herman Blake wrote, "in my opinion the gift represents the profound and sensitive recognition of grassroots people for your extraordinary vision and leadership."²³² As her story continued to spread to local newspapers across both the country and world, letters to McCarty from people praising her for her act of service to the University began to pour into University Communications, the public relations department at USM. Many of these letters came from people who read about McCarty's story, felt a personal connection to her

²²⁹ Walton, Oral history with Miss Oseola McCarty, 1.

²³⁰"McCarty awarded symbol of generosity," Hattiesburg American, Oseola McCarty Collection, M442, Box 5, Folder 4, Historical Manuscripts, Special Collections, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries.

²³¹"McCarty awarded symbol of generosity," Hattiesburg American, Oseola McCarty Collection, M442, Box 5, Folder 4, Historical Manuscripts, Special Collections, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries.

²³²Correspondence between J. Herman Blake and Aubrey K. Lucas, 8 August 1995, M442, Box 2, Folder 4, Oseola McCarty Collection, Historical Manuscripts, Special Collections, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries.

experiences, and were moved to respond to her acts of generosity and kindness. For instance, in a letter to McCarty, Mrs. Becky Johnson, a white woman from California wrote about her childhood experiences living in Montgomery, Alabama and being partially raised by Octavia, her family's housemaid, and Phoebe Champs, the family cook.²³³ She mentioned that because she grew up in the 1930s in the South during a time where attitudes towards African Americans were generally negative and segregation was still common practice, she wished that she "could have been mature enough to see the bigger picture."²³⁴ Johnson praised McCarty for "making the way possible for others to walk the same halls and change the course of their lives."²³⁵ This letter represents one of countless examples of letters sent to McCarty from white people praising her for her actions and voicing how story changed their perception of how race relationships were viewed in the South. On the other hand, McCarty also received letters from black people across the country that memorialized her in the black community. For instance, Nianza Halbritter, a black woman in California, wrote in a letter that she was deeply moved by the work of McCarty and related to her story because her mother also ironed clothes for members of the community.²³⁶ Halbritter also wrote to McCarty to ask if she would be willing to impart wisdom to her writing, Ms. McCarty, my last reason for writing is to see

²³³ Correspondence between Becky Johnson and Oseola McCarty, 3 August 1995, M442, Box 2, Folder 4, Oseola McCarty Collection, Historical Manuscripts, Special Collections, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries.

²³⁴ Correspondence between Becky Johnson and Oseola McCarty, 3 August 1995, M442, Box 2, Folder 4, Oseola McCarty Collection, Historical Manuscripts, Special Collections, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries.

²³⁵ Correspondence between Becky Johnson and Oseola McCarty, 3 August 1995, M442, Box 2, Folder 4, Oseola McCarty Collection, Historical Manuscripts, Special Collections, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries.

²³⁶ Correspondence between Nianza Halbritter and Oseola McCarty, 4 August 1995, M442, Box 2, Folder 4, Oseola McCarty Collection, Historical Manuscripts, Special Collections, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries.

if you can give me some wisdom you've acquired through the years.”²³⁷ In the span of a few short weeks, McCarty went from being an unknown servant to her community to being a light in an otherwise dark world and an inspiration and example for others to follow.

Not only was Southern Miss also featured as the benefitting institution along with McCarty in every article published detailing her actions, in many instances the university was described as predominately white institution. This distinction of the university in the mainstream media coupled with the response that McCarty received from the public shows that this classification of the university influences the public memory of McCarty and her contributions to Southern Miss. When examining the letters that McCarty received from people following the media attention that ensued, many people saw McCarty's contributions to Southern Miss as an example of how racial relations in the South had improved. Furthermore, the outreach that McCarty received in the months and years following her actions show the public's awareness of McCarty's race and how her contributions to Southern Miss as a predominately white institution represents an anomaly in the mainstream media coverage. This further advances the point that the public memory of McCarty's story and Southern Miss as institution are influenced by the popular culture, more specifically the media attention that came following the event. The desire to communicate relatable and uplifting historical narratives to as many different types of people as possible means that institutions must rely popular culture and mainstream media outlets to expand their outreach and diversify the impact of their

²³⁷ Correspondence between Nianza Halbritter and Oseola McCarty, 4 August 1995, M442, Box 2, Folder 4, Oseola McCarty Collection, Historical Manuscripts, Special Collections, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries.

interpretations.²³⁸ By emphasizing the juxtaposition between McCarty's status as a black woman in Hattiesburg with her connection to Southern Miss as a predominately white institution in the media, Southern Miss is able to exert power over the public memory of McCarty and broaden the outreach of the institution.

While the strategy of emphasizing McCarty's race in the conveyance of her story worked in the favor of Southern Miss by portraying the university in a positive light as a diverse institution that is welcome to all students and community members, it has also minimized parts of McCarty's story in the outward facing representations of McCarty's life. Doing this puts the burden to recognize silenced interpretations on the public audiences and falls in line with Glassberg's theory on the growing relationship between popular culture and public memory when he writes, "Even the most commercial products contain the suppressed collective memories of subordinate embedded within it; through close analysis, audiences can recognize hidden meanings and memories encoded in these narratives."²³⁹ Although media and popular culture can expand the outreach of certain narratives to a variety of different communities, the issue arises that most people and communities are not able to recognize hidden meaning or varying silenced interpretations of the historical narrative. This theory greatly contributes to current public memory of Oseola McCarty and how she is memorialized at Southern Miss as a black washerwoman who donated her life savings to Southern Miss and shows that universities possess the power to control its presentation in the media and mainstream culture and have the power to silence parts of narrative boost the university's image to the public.

²³⁸ Glassberg, "Public History and the Study of Memory," 14-15.

²³⁹ Glassberg, "Public History and the Study of Memory," 14-15.

Not only did Southern Miss utilize the national publicity that came from McCarty's trust fund to bolster its mission to be known as a progressive and premier university in the South, it also used the attention to recognize areas for growth within its own public relations and fundraising efforts.²⁴⁰ For example, the Southern Miss Foundation was established in 1959 and for almost 25 years was solely directed by USM alumni Moran M. Pope, Jr. and Powell Ogletree.²⁴¹ According to J.T. Tisdale, during this time, the USM Foundation was very limited in its fundraising efforts because it was operated by the Powell Ogletree who was also acting as the director of the alumni association.²⁴² Tisdale also stated that prior to the hiring of Bill Pace as the executive director of the USM Foundation, the Foundation was a "money taking organization," meaning that is someone came to the Foundation and wanted to set up a scholarship, then the Foundation would take care of the request.²⁴³ However, when Bill Pace was hired as the executive director of the USM Foundation in the early 1990s, the fundraising strategy of the organization changed from a passive approach to an active approach. In the model of active fundraising, employees of the Foundation would go out into the public and speak to people that could be interested in donating. While, in theory, this model would increase the number of endowments that the foundation had, for the first few years, the foundation lacked the staff to increase fundraising efforts that would compete with larger institutions in the state that had larger endowments.²⁴⁴ However, when Oseola McCarty's

²⁴⁰ Morgan, *Treasured Past, Golden Future*, 169.

²⁴¹ "History of the USM Foundation," The University of Southern Mississippi, <https://www.usmfoundation.com/s/1149/foundation/index.aspx?sid=1149&gid=1&pgid=927>.

²⁴² Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

²⁴³ Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

²⁴⁴ Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

trust fund was established and the story of her contributions circulated throughout the news outlets, J.T Tisdale claimed that the publicity that both McCarty and Southern Miss received placed an overbearing emphasis on development fundraising within the USM Foundation.²⁴⁵ Tisdale claims that McCarty's contributions to the university, pushed the Foundation into a new modern era of fundraising that focused on targeting specific groups of people that would be most willing to donate to the university.²⁴⁶ For example, instead of focusing on attracting lawyers, bankers, and doctors to donate to the Foundation, Bill Pace and Aubrey K. Lucas claimed that it was more advantageous to reach out to female school teachers who have been left large estates when their husbands die.²⁴⁷ Overall in regard to the advancement of the Foundation, Tisdale claimed that McCarty's story, "really pushed us ahead, way ahead of where we naturally would have grown. Not because of the amount of money that was given, but by the publicity we were given, and pushing the need to do that."²⁴⁸

The impact that McCarty's contributions had on the university far expanded past the initial financial support that was given to provide scholarships for students to attend college. Rather, her story provided an avenue for which Southern Miss was able to revamp its fundraising and public relations marketing strategies to both catch up and keep up with other universities that had much deeper history and larger alumni and endowment bases. Although McCarty's narrative provided the necessary support and national attention to bring structural and functional changes to fundraising efforts, it also provided

²⁴⁵ Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

²⁴⁶ Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

²⁴⁷ Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

²⁴⁸ Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

the opportunity for the university communications and public relations departments to grow and expand its outreach for the university. For instance, J.T Tisdale was a graduate assistant in the public relations office when the news of McCarty's trust fund broke in the news.²⁴⁹ Because of this, Tisdale went from being a part-time employee in the department working toward a master's degree to being a full-time employee for the department as a project manager for McCarty. In this role, Tisdale helped arrange and accompany McCarty to her media appearances as well as streamlined communication between McCarty and the press.²⁵⁰

Out of an effort to protect McCarty from being taken advantage of by the popular media, Southern Miss used its public relations and university communications departments to assist McCarty in dealing with the national attention that received. However, doing this allowed Southern Miss to externally control McCarty's public memory in a way that would benefit the university the most. The public relations department had the freedom to choose which appearances McCarty made and what elements of her story were most emphasized the popular media. This meant that her narrative was most likely to be presented in a way that emphasized McCarty as a black woman that gave her life savings to a predominately white institution so that students that looked like her could attend college and further their education in a way that she could not. Though her story was published and shared for all to read and celebrate, the university's role as an institution that operates under the influence of popular media and

²⁴⁹ Hannah Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

²⁵⁰ Hannah Arnold, An Oral History with Paul Laughlin, J.T Tisdale, and David Tisdale on Oseola McCarty.

culture prevents McCarty's full story to live freely in public memory. Rather, a condensed and altered narrative exists that ultimately benefits the university more than that it gives credit to McCarty as a woman and servant leader. Not only does Southern Miss's power as a predominately white institution allow to influence the popular culture and media, but it also allows it to give power the racial narrative McCarty's story offers while silencing narratives that offer a more holistic presentation of her life.

Because public universities are public facing institutions that strive to attract as many people as possible because it allows them to grow their enrollment, financial support, and overall image, they must rely on the societal popular culture and mainstream media to expand their outreach to a network of communities. However, at the same time this allows university elites that already possess power to dictate the mode and extent to which the university interacts with the mainstream media. For Oseola McCarty, this means that her story was altered by the university to benefit the mission of the university in the most efficient way possible. As a result, Southern Miss moved closer to achieving its goal of becoming, "The University for the New South," with the help of Oseola McCarty, though her public memory and memorialization in the history of the university would never suggest so. Rather, the life of Oseola McCarty and legacy that she left is commemorated with a statue of her likeness located in the heart of campus. According to Southern Miss, to learn about McCarty, all you have to do is sit down and ask her as if she were sitting in a rocking chair on her front porch at her home in downtown Hattiesburg.

CHAPTER IV: EPILOGUE: TROUBLED PAST, GOLDEN FUTURE

An in-depth examination of narratives and Southern Miss legacies of M.M. Roberts and Oseola McCarty reveals the value of exploring the full presentation of historical narratives within university history. Unveiling university histories enhances campus communities by providing more points of connection for marginalized populations and interest groups that help campuses develop a stronger sense of belonging. Yet it also gives the university and its stakeholders opportunities to show greater appreciation for the people and events who shaped the dynamic of the university community in prior generations. At the same time, presenting full and dynamic narratives within university history also emphasizes honesty, transparency, and acceptance into the production and presentation of a university's past. When higher education institutions are more accepting of contextualizing challenging narratives about people or events within its history, there are more avenues for conversations about the tenets and values of the university's community. Nevertheless, doing so is particularly difficult in the South as the complexities of the region's history create highly contested atmospheres within the public sphere of Southern culture.²⁵¹

Over time, this can become complicated in the South because Southerners are known to identify with several different interlocking communities that have a shared understanding of the region's reputation across the state.²⁵² This is particularly true in the state of Mississippi. For example, Stephen M. Monroe notes in *Heritage and Hate: Old South Rhetoric at Southern Universities*, "Mississippians are undoubtedly a proud people

²⁵¹ Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory*, 3.

²⁵² Monroe, *Heritage and Hate: Old South Rhetoric at Southern Universities*, (University of Alabama Press, 2021), xvi.

who are often bound together by a shared understanding of adversity. Mississippians know about their bad reputation.”²⁵³ However, within this conceptualization of Mississippi, any understanding of shared adversity is almost always dominated by the white perspective, leaving little room for members of minority groups to enter into and feel comfortable expressing their historical or cultural perspectives in the public sphere.²⁵⁴ In the end, this leaves groups competing for their own interpretations of historical narratives in communities, the search for what historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage calls a community’s “historical truth.”²⁵⁵

Universities play a critical role in influencing local community culture. It is not only a center for public culture, but it also serves as a place where people from a variety of backgrounds can come together to generate new ideas and celebrate community traditions.²⁵⁶ This defines the University of Southern Mississippi’s role in the city of Hattiesburg. Based on this, USM and the city of Hattiesburg work collectively to shape community narratives and offer safe and welcoming environments for everyone. USM was founded in 1910 as a state teachers’ college and has since become an integral part of the Hattiesburg and larger Pine-Belt communities because the spheres work together to offer students, staff, and other stakeholders a premier educational experience and a hospitable and impactful social experience.

The city of Hattiesburg itself has a storied history as a premier New South town with rich African American and Civil Rights Movement historical narratives, and the city

²⁵³ Monroe, *Heritage and Hate*, xvi.

²⁵⁴ Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory*, 4.

²⁵⁵ Brundage, *The Southern Past*, 4.

²⁵⁶ Gumprecht, “The Campus as a Public Place in the American College Town.” 86.

is actively working to revive, celebrate, and preserve these legacies in several different ways. For example, within the past year, the Sixth Street Museum District, a district managed by the Hattiesburg Convention Commission that encompasses sites dedicated to the preservation of black history in the city of Hattiesburg, has moved to the Sixth Street Museum District and has transformed it into a historical landmark where people can visit.²⁵⁷ Hattiesburg history, though, is replete with historical narratives centered on racism, discrimination, and white supremacy. As a result, the city must work to accept and contextualize these parts of the Hattiesburg's narrative to create more inclusive and progressive communities within the city, and in turn should be able to rely on USM to support and advance this work.

However, by offering a glimpse into the ways in which USM has chosen to present its history to the public through university publications and on-campus memorials, this thesis shows that USM has room for growth in presenting complete historical narratives. Embracing these parts of university history provides more credibility to the institution's image. Current presentations of USM's history include only pieces or even whole narratives that were silenced by current iterations of university history in a manner seemingly beneficial to university stakeholders including alumni and university donors. In a sense, this contradicts the values and mission of USM that university administration claims to be at the center of USM's spirit. This can be seen

²⁵⁷ Beveridge, Lici, "Find out about Hattiesburg's Black History during Events at Sixth Street Museum District." *Hattiesburg American*, January, 31, 2023, <https://www.hattiesburgamerican.com/story/news/local/2023/01/31/hattiesburg-celebrates-black-history-with-events-on-museum-row/69853967007/>.

clearly in the university's official history, *Treasured Past, Golden Future: The Centennial History of the University of Southern Mississippi*.

Morgan, a retired Professor of History at USM and former Director of the Center of Oral History and Cultural Heritage, received his bachelor's and master's degrees from USM and was commissioned by former university president Dr. Martha Saunders to return to USM in the latter stage of his career and write an updated history of the institution for its centennial celebration.²⁵⁸ This publication built on a previous university history he wrote for the Southern Miss's seventy-fifth anniversary, and this project was greatly influenced by the USM Alumni Association. In this case, underlying institutional influences have shaped the university's public memory. In *Treasured Past's* "Forward," Saunders proudly claimed that the evolution of the institution over its one-hundred-year history was a "labor of love." To support this claim, Morgan's official university history presents five distinct forces that helped to celebrate the past and drive the institution forward into the future.²⁵⁹ Some of these forces include having, "a spirit of humanity characterized by kindness, compassion, respect, and support for others," as well as a "a traditional culture with long established customs and beliefs."²⁶⁰ Most notably, Saunders stated that USM is characterized by, "[a] diverse culture" with "a rich racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and disciplinary diversity."²⁶¹ Yet Morgan's university history silences interpretations of historical narratives that are outside of white perspectives and,

²⁵⁸ Tisdale, "University Historian Dr. Chester 'Bo' Morgan Retires | The University of Southern Mississippi."

²⁵⁹ Morgan, *Treasured Past, Golden Future*, 6.

²⁶⁰ Morgan, *Treasured Past, Golden Future*, 6.

²⁶¹ Morgan, *Treasured Past, Golden Future*, 6.

therefore, asserts cultural privilege to a dominate white narrative. Diverse voices are nearly nonexistent in Morgan's history.

The contradictions between these false claims and the presentation of historical narratives of USM's public memory presents a problem for the future of institutional advancement. USM is approaching a pivotal point in its history when the presentation of raw, contextualized historical narratives by the university and its stakeholders has never been more important. In recent years, media presentations of unjust killings of Black people, including George Floyd led to widespread protests on college campuses demanding that these spaces be cleansed of racist memorials.²⁶² Student-led social movements and campus groups committed to this revisionist work both at USM and universities around the countries have helped to shed light on the memorialization of controversial figures on college and university campuses. These students have discovered reinforced dominant historical narratives of hatred, discrimination, and oppression by advocating for the removal of these memorials while demanding revisions to incomplete historical narratives. In some cases, universities have renamed buildings named for controversial figures and have worked to conduct in-depth research in university histories and their effects on students. In June 2020, Clemson University removed John C. Calhoun's name from the honors college after students and faculty campaigned for its removal due to Calhoun's legacy for being a proponent of slavery and an owner of slaves.²⁶³ In order to successfully change the name, the university requested an exemption

²⁶² Anderson, "Campuses Reckon With Racist Past," *Inside Higher Ed*, July 6, 2020, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/07/06/campuses-remove-monuments-and-building-names-legacies-racism>.

²⁶³ Anderson, "Clemson Removes Calhoun Name From Honors College," *Inside Higher Ed*, June 14, 2020, <https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2020/06/15/clemson-removes-calhoun-name-honors-college>.

to the state's Heritage Act prohibiting changes to the name of local and state buildings and monuments that pay tribute to state heritage.²⁶⁴

Additionally, in 2018, the USM Student Government Association formed an ad hoc committee to investigate the history of how university buildings were named. More specifically, this committee investigated the public memory and memorialization of Dr. William D. McCain, former university president who denied Clyde Kennard admission to the institution and was known as an outspoken racist and segregationist with connections to the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission. On campus, McCain's historical narrative is preserved through the naming of the McCain Library and Archives.²⁶⁵ While this committee worked to investigate his public memory in hopes of removing his name from the building, they were unsuccessful in large in-part to Mississippi Code Title 55 that bars buildings, streets, and other structures commemorated to military veterans from being renamed.²⁶⁶ McCain was a World War II veteran.

Movements such as these demonstrate the need for a reevaluation of the presentation of historical narratives within USM's history. Using the framework of institutional public memory at universities outlined in this research helps to magnify more previously silenced narratives in Southern Miss's history. Unlocking these narratives would provide a deeper appreciation for our university history, public image, and overall campus community. Now is the time for university administration, donors, faculty, staff, and students to rise to the occasion and commit to treasuring a past that is

²⁶⁴ Anderson, "Clemson Removes Calhoun Name From Honors College."

²⁶⁵ Ciurezak, "Fuss over Name of University of Southern Mississippi's McCain Library" *Hattiesburg American*, December 18, 2011.

²⁶⁶ "2020 Mississippi Code," Justia Law, <https://law.justia.com/codes/mississippi/2020/title-55/chapter-15/subchapter-alterationofhistoricalmonumentsandmemorials/section-55-15-81/>.

honest, authentic, and inclusive, a past that paves a future that is golden for everyone, not just the people in the room of influence. Every member of the campus community at USM deserves to feel valued, heard, and respected, and rewriting historical narratives just might take the institution to new heights.

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