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Race Relations at the Neshoba County Fair: Examining Interdependency between Tradition, Intergenerational Racism, and Racial Disenfranchisement

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Race Relations at the Neshoba County Fair: Examining Interdependency between
Tradition, Intergenerational Racism, and Racial Disenfranchisement

by

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Submitted to the Honors College of
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ABSTRACT

The Neshoba County Fair in Neshoba County, Mississippi, is a place of idiosyncrasy and incomparability. As of 2023, the Neshoba County Fair still existed as a place of explicit residential and social segregation. This project aimed to interview fairgoers at the 2023 Neshoba County Fair to unveil the truth about the Fair's continual racial exclusion. How has the Fair remained segregated? What makes racism at the Neshoba County Fair different from traditional racism? To answer these questions, anonymous interviewees at the Neshoba County Fair were asked a series of questions tailored to provide answers to those two research questions. As a result, the interviews provided unprecedented, unbiased responses about the Fair's relationship with civil rights. The reactions were one-of-a-kind and did not directly represent any coined racial theories within political science. As a result, this paper coins the theory of "Neshobism," which is categorized as unbeknownst racism because of evolutionary intergenerational prejudice. From there, this project investigates the characteristics of "Neshobism" and how it functions to safeguard tradition. "Neshobism" represents a case of unintentional racism, which this investigation emphasizes is more dangerous than traditional racism. Additionally, this project maintains that the Neshoba County Fair is a racial microcosm of many social and residential scenes across the country, and "Neshobism" serves as a direct example of how racism can evolve and persist over time. Nevertheless, this investigation aims to explain the relationship between intergenerational racism, tradition, and white spaces by explicitly focusing on the Neshoba County Fair.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my idiosyncratic and inspirational grandmother, Dr. Laura Bryan, for her endless support of this project.

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I would first like to acknowledge my advisor, Dr. Robert Press, for his unwavering support and assistance during this project. Despite often taking “unique” approaches to answering research questions, Dr. Press’s guidance allowed me to balance creativity and research. I acknowledge his continued advice and encouragement throughout this process. In addition, I am grateful for the guidance and support from the Honors College at the University of Southern Mississippi.

I thank my friends and family for their continual support and encouragement during this project. Their actions have been uplifting and catalyzed the completion of this project. Most notably, I acknowledge my grandmother, Dr. Laura Bryan, for her indispensable role in this project.

Finally, I acknowledge the twelve anonymous participants who volunteered to be interviewed. Their contribution is invaluable to this research, and I appreciate their involvement in this project.

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CHAPTER I Assessing the Neshoba County Fair

In rural Neshoba County, an unusual anomaly— rows of colorful two- and three-story cabins— paint the side of the winding country road. Each summer, during the last week of July, thousands of individuals from across the United States come together to celebrate the Neshoba County Fair. Unbothered by the daunting, humid heat, fairgoers joyfully indulge in festivities, ranging from exclusive parties to horse races to midway rides to political stumping. The Fair's elite enjoy nights of lavish, exclusive parties in opulent cabins accompanied by alluring live music and neon lights. The hundreds of pastel-colored Fair cabins represent one of Mississippi's most unusual yet mysterious traditions: the Neshoba County Fair.

The Fair's exclusivity and reliance on generational traditions have always captivated audiences and curious spectators alike, leading to influxes of hundreds of thousands of people crammed into rural Neshoba County each summer. Surprisingly, aside from descriptive and vivid adjectives, its history, and its influence on Mississippi politics, the Neshoba County Fair is vastly under-researched. One aim of this project is to bridge a gap in the research by obtaining detailed, authentic interviews from fairgoers regarding race relations and ideologies at the Neshoba County Fair. Through interviews conducted at the Neshoba County Fair and a simple visual analysis, it is evident that the Fair presents a striking case of blatant de facto segregation, as Black representation within the Fair's social scene is absent. Despite national progress regarding civil rights issues, the Fair's continual existence as a white space raises questions about its ethics and morality. After a series of interviews, it was apparent that intergenerational racism and tradition play a significant role in this ongoing practice of racial exclusion.

Research Organization

This research investigates the role of tradition in shaping generational racist ideologies and maintaining the Fair's exclusionary and discriminatory practices. The Neshoba County Fair's existence and stagnation as a total white space illustrates the practice of intergenerational racism for the maintenance of tradition. The Neshoba County Fair, or Mississippi's Giant House Party, has existed for over a century as a place for families and friends to gather and engage in Fair traditions. The Fair, however, endures as a total white space, as no Black families own fair cabin(s) or exist within the social scene. While this form of segregation is de facto— legal— there have been continual efforts to isolate people of color from the Fair. These continual efforts, often covert, involve a generational passage of ideologies relating to preserving the Fair. Fairgoers believe the Fair's segregated status exists purely out of Black discontent and lack of care. However, through a series of interviews conducted at the Fair, white fairgoers were not ready for desegregation, as many insinuated the presence of violence if racial integration efforts were to be made. Through a series of qualitative interviews conducted at the Neshoba County Fair, this research aims to highlight the role of racism for the sake of maintaining tradition, for this project notes several fairgoers who believe that the Fair's existence as a white space should be safeguarded to maintain its traditional white identity. The research conducted at the Fair examines the correlation between racism and tradition and how, over time, it is subject to evolution. The evolutionary and generational racism presented at the Neshoba County Fair is not endemic to itself; however, the Fair illustrates a striking example of what, perhaps, could be happening across the country.

Because the interviews provide the primary contributions of the research and are unique, as explained, they come immediately after the methodology and prepare the reader to understand the remainder of the study better. The literature supports the study by offering possible explanations for the interview responses. This study takes an extra step that makes it easier to consider literature with the findings of the study in the same section, subdivided by critical topics. An extensive discussion regarding the relationship between the primary and secondary research, as well as a brief findings and conclusion section, will organize the remainder of the study.

Methodology

In July 2023, at the Neshoba County Fair, twelve intricate and expansive interviews were conducted with deeply involved fairgoers. The methodology involved asking questions regarding the Fair's social atmosphere, political history, segregation status, racial tensions, and traditions. Interviewees participated in a singular, in-person, and thirty-minute to hour-long exchange, answering questions and sharing personal Fair experiences and stories. Most importantly, interviewees answered uncomfortable questions regarding the Fair's racial history, exclusion, and tensions, specifically discussing hypotheticals about racial integration into the cabins and social atmosphere. The participants will remain anonymous to conceal their identity due to the social consequences that could arise. The interviews focused on the Neshoba County Fair, its white identity, reliance on tradition, and justification for racism. The interviews set the tone of the entire thesis, as they reveal the ideologies of true Fairgoers. As someone who has attended the Neshoba County Fair since infancy, because my family owns a fair cabin, fairgoers were far more receptive to me than talking to outsiders about the Fair.

While I did not personally know many of the interviewees, the Fair is extremely interconnected. Nevertheless, although I am quite familiar with the Fair, I was not familiar with the interviewees, and I did not anticipate certain responses or answers. In my family, missing a Fair is a taboo, so I have attended the Fair for the past twenty years. While reporters, authors, and illustrators swarm the Neshoba County Fair each summer, true Fairgoers— those that have cabins— are often reserved, leaving the mystery of the Fair’s de facto segregation intact. However, because of my history with the Neshoba County Fair and the anonymity of the interviews, fairgoers opened up to this scholar regarding the fair’s racial history and current race relations.

CHAPTER II Literature Review

White Spaces

In 1889, Mississippi's Giant House Party, officially known as the Neshoba County Fair, was founded outside Philadelphia, Mississippi. For decades, the Fair differed significantly from the colorful and lavish fair cabins, brightly lit amusement rides, and exclusive nightlife seen today. Something that has remained consistent with the Fair is the absence of Black Americans in the cabin and social scene. The vibrant 700+ cabins are owned only by White families. Watts argues, "For each summer, the cabins, all owned by White families, become the heart of a Disneyesque 'Southland,' a racially segregated imagining of a Mississippi town" (2002, 39). Through several tactics, the Neshoba County Fair maintained this white identity, leaving the Fair racially segregated for over one hundred years. As a result, the Neshoba County Fair continues to exist and operate as a white space. A white space, as it sounds, is a space characterized and dominated by exclusively white individuals. Anderson argues that white spaces are distinctly and overtly white and that white spaces are characterized by an "overwhelming presence of white people and their absence of black people" (2015, 13).

One racially exclusionary mechanism enacted by fairgoers to protect the Fair's white identity is the practice of racial shunning. Coates defines shunning as "the practice of habitually ignoring or avoiding contact with a particular person or group" (2011, 124). Consequently, the presence of Black individuals in these spaces sparks conversation and questions among whites. Anderson states that white individuals in these spaces, regarding Black individuals, "try to make sense of him or her—to figure out 'who that is,' or to

gain a sense of the nature of the person's business and whether they need to be concerned" (2015, 13).

The Fair's position as an established white space has encouraged decades of generational racial stereotyping, stigmatization, and skewed ideologies. In turn, the decades of continual racial stigmatization at the Fair have catalyzed evolutionary racism. With time, racism must take on new and masked forms, like racial microaggressions, to function within society (Embrick & Moore 2020, 1). Peggy C. Davis defines racist microaggressions as "incessant, often gratuitous and subtle offenses" that target non-White individuals (1989, 39). White spaces, like the Fair, safeguard the ideals and tenets of white supremacy, leading to ideological dangers outside of the Fair (Embrick & Moore 2020, 1). In addition to the cabins, recipes, and various keepsakes, traditions, and heritage are passed through families, which many fairgoers aim to preserve. Based on the existing racial makeup of the Neshoba County Fair, perhaps a tradition for many fairgoers involves racial exclusion and the passage of racist verbiage through generations. Nevertheless, the tactical passage of familial traditions and beliefs at the Fair could account for its prolonged segregation (Moore, 2020). The soft and often covert tactics utilized by familial lineages to exclude Black individuals from the Fair highlight the dangers of functioning and modern white spaces. Embrick and Moore argue that these social spaces encourage stereotyping and stigmatization and "ensure Whites' fantasy(ies) of complete dominion over place and space, as well as control over brown and Black bodies" (2020, 1). The dangers of white spaces are evident: generational racism, evolutionarily racism, protection and validation of white supremacy, stereotyping, and so

on. As Embrick and Moore note, white spaces often “reproduce” racist ideologies and white supremacy (2020, 1).

Evolutionary Intergenerational Racism

The reproduction of these ideals in white spaces directly correlates to the generational passage of racist ideologies and, in turn, the continual and transformative racism that exists at the Neshoba County Fair (Anderson 2015, 1). According to Braveman et al., “Systemic and structural racism are forms of racism that are pervasively and deeply embedded in systems, laws, written or unwritten policies, and entrenched practices and beliefs that produce, condone, and perpetuate widespread unfair treatment and oppression of people of color” (2022, 171). In addition, Liu et al. define systemic racism as a practice where “anti- Blackness, white supremacy, and racial capitalism interlock to create and recreate white space and time” (2023, 244).

The intergenerational passage of prejudiced ideologies through families and cabins highlights institutionalized or systemic racism in non-traditional communities or societal groups. Ongoing systemic racism promotes the establishment and persistence of *white spaces* in America. As a private entity in rural Mississippi, the Neshoba County Fair has safeguarded its outdated traditions, and state leaders and politicians rarely criticize the Fair’s practices. Liu et al. assert, “Through the creation of private property, institutional inequities become embedded and structured for the benefit of white people” (2023, 244). Over time, the structural inequities at the Fair have persisted, as White individuals still own all seven hundred fair cabins. Evolutionary Racism at the Neshoba County Fair The structural racism embedded into the roots of the Neshoba County Fair has thrived for

over a century. However, the symbiotic prejudice associated with structural racism has taken on new shapes and forms.

Covert Racism

Over time, racism at the Fair has experienced dramatic changes with its overall covertness. Because racism is invariably subject to evolution, new and socially “acceptable” forms of prejudice– like covert racism and color blindness– flourish consequently. Because covert racism is often less explicit, it can be overlooked. Coates asserts that covert racism “is often excused or confused with mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion, ritual and ceremony, acceptance, and rejection” that “operates as a boundary between racial elite and racial non-elite (2011, 121).

Nevertheless, the maintenance and prolongation of traditional practices by fairgoers are examples of covert racism in action. While racism at the Fair has not always been covert, progress with civil rights in Mississippi pressured fairgoers to adapt. Because covert racism is often camouflaged, it can go unnoticed, even by the perpetrator of the action. Covert racism, or “silent racism,” refers to internal and predisposed racist feelings or ideologies. Trepagnier argues that silent racism “refers to unspoken negative thoughts, emotions, and attitudes regarding African Americans and other people of color on the part of white people” (2001, 142).

White Fragility

Individuals can engage in covert racist tactics unknowingly, and, therefore, it can be difficult for them to accept wrongdoing. Robin Diangelo coins this action as *white fragility*. Diangelo argues, “This insulated environment of racial protection builds white expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate

racial stress” (2015, 54). Additionally, Diangelo holds that “white fragility may be conceptualized as a product of the habitus, a response or “condition” produced and reproduced by the continual social and material advantages of the white structural position” (2015, 58). Racial change at the Neshoba County Fair cannot occur without fairgoers accepting their prejudiced transgressions. Bosmajian asserts that “white Americans, through the mass media and individually, must begin to focus their attention not on the condition of the victimized, but on the victimizer” (1969, 263). Black Fatigue at the Neshoba County Fair white spaces have significant impacts on the Black community, whether intentionally or unintentionally. At the core of many white spaces is the presence of repetitive stigmatization and identification towards non-White individuals (Winters 2020, 98). Winters asserts that stigmatized identities are characterized by “an identity that is socially devalued with negative stereotypes and beliefs attached to it” (2020, 98).

Black Fatigue

The continuation of these beliefs through time– in white spaces like the Neshoba County Fair– significantly contributes to and catalyzes the possibility of Black Fatigue, which has significant consequences. According to Anderson, the impact of white spaces is glaring, arguing that “injury most often has the same effect: deflation and a sense of marginalization, regardless of the black person’s previous negotiations, putative achievements, or claims to status” (2015, 15). White spaces, like the Neshoba County Fair, contribute to feelings of racial marginalization and exclusion, which stagnates its identity and engenders “Black Fatigue” (Winters 2020, 4). Black Fatigue, according to Winters, is a result of “the interconnected, multilayered, compounding factors caused by

racism that perpetuate the cycle of fatigue” (2020, 4). At the Neshoba County Fair, the ongoing intergenerational passage of misguided and prejudiced ideologies for the sake of tradition potentially has perpetuated feelings of fatigue. Because racist attitudes are subject to evolution and adaptation, “softer,” more covert, prejudiced attitudes emerge (Ward 1985, 4). These “reformed” attitudes, Watts argues, “are represented by the cabins themselves and encoded in the seemingly benign cultural practices of singing, visiting, and celebrating family life” (2002, 2). Ward argues, “If prejudice is to play a role in politics, it must do so through the use of culturally acceptable terms” (1985, 4). Based on the existing literature surrounding racism and the Neshoba County Fair, it is feasible that evolutionary intergenerational prejudice has contributed to ongoing negative racial attitudes towards integration, perhaps mobilizing repetitive feelings of Black Fatigue (Winters 2020, 4).

Negative white attitudes towards racial integration at the Fair perpetuate hostile ideologies surrounding Black individuals, likely catalyzing an ongoing pattern of Black Fatigue. These stereotypes result from the intergenerational passage of tradition and ideology within Fair cabins. Using miscegenation ideologies as an example, Ward depicts a similar intergenerational transmission of prejudice, arguing that “when a child is informed that it is a bad idea for whites to marry blacks, the child learns prejudice.” (1985, 20). This “intergenerational transmission of prejudice” preserves the Fair’s white identity, possibly contributing to the prolongation of Black Fatigue (Ward 1985, 20).

Black attitudes towards the Fair, based on interviews from existing literature, indicate the possibility of Black Fatigue. Trent Watts highlights an individual’s— a Black man from Neshoba County— belief regarding the Fair’s relationship between white and

Black individuals. “It is for them, not for us,” he says (2002, 2). Similarly, a Black individual being interviewed in 1992 by Frank Fisher regarding the Neshoba County Fair stated, “It has long been a white affair where blacks were just allowed to work. Blacks were not welcomed as visitors but rather as participants, said Dr. Douglas Conner, NAACP chairman in nearby Oktibbeha County” (1992, 1). While the existing literature illustrates a probable correlation between the Neshoba County Fair and Black Fatigue, it would require additional research to corroborate the claim.

The perspectives mentioned result from decades of Black alienation from the Fair. The continual exclusion of Black individuals at the Fair, based on the documented literature, has translated into feelings of forced acceptance and disinterest. White spaces contribute to mental health disparities in the Black community, and Winters argues that “Medical experts report that being socially rejected, experiencing stereotypes, and suffering discrimination trigger the same neural circuits that process physical injury and translate it into the experience we call pain” (2020, 74). The rejection and prejudiced behaviors from White fairgoers towards Black individuals at the Fair are likely both an uncomfortable and painful recurrence. Nevertheless, the continual resistance towards Black integration is instrumental to the Fair’s maintenance as a white social space.

De Facto Segregation

The perpetual resistance to racial integration, in addition to decades of possible Black fatigue, soft discrimination, and evolutionary racism, crafts the unique case of de facto segregation at the Neshoba County Fair. As a result of the Civil Rights Movement in 1964, the United States bans discriminatory practices and segregation in public environments. Cases of de facto segregation, on the other hand, preserve statuses of

legality. Frankenburg and Taylor argue that de facto distinction emerged to distinguish between statutory segregation and segregation arising from private choices and created a class of segregation not protected by the law (2018, 189-190). Instances of de facto segregation threaten equality and racial progress as a narrative of white supremacy persists in these white spaces. A key feature of de facto segregation, Frankenburg and Taylor argue, is the presence of a “racial imbalance” between whites and non-whites (2018, 205). Often used to describe the racial makeup of specific schools and districts, the term racial imbalance is expansive. Researched cases of racial imbalance— de facto segregated spaces—, according to Fiel, show “evidence of a dynamic interplay between processes of exclusion and challenges from the excluded” (2013, 831). The direct link between ongoing racially exclusive practices in white spaces and the emergence of de facto segregation is apparent. While the Neshoba County Fair illustrates a unique case of de facto segregation, it is not independent and exclusive, as additional ongoing cases of de facto segregation are transpiring across the country. Rice argues, “The problem of de facto segregation arises in many forms throughout the three principal areas of education, employment, and housing as well as in social and other relationships (2016, 309). Rice holds that two factors are essential to establishing de facto segregation. The author asserts that “the basic principles of color-blindness and primary reliance upon voluntarism” apply to employment practices, housing, specific social spaces, and education (Rice 2016, 321).

White Supremacy

The existence and preservation of white supremacy at the Neshoba County Fair has played a crucial role in allowing the Fair to maintain its white identity. White

supremacy, as it sounds, is the ideology that holds that White individuals are the superior race. While variants of White supremacy are common across the United States, it is ubiquitous in the South, where remnants of Jim Crow still prevail. Because of this, some Southerners, including Mississippians, have deeply rooted beliefs about the fairness of segregation. “Deeply embedded in Southern thinking is the firm conviction that segregation is inextricably rooted in nature and as such is eternally fixed,” argues Vander Zanden (1959, 386). Interviewees suggest that racial integration at the Neshoba County Fair could permanently impact the establishment. The belief that racial integration could sour an entire establishment is, historically, a shared ideology among white supremacists in the South. According to Vander Zanden, “the breakdown of segregation in any of its aspects will inevitably lead to racial amalgamation, resulting in a host of disastrous consequences” (1959, 386). Although these beliefs are “offensive” and evoke strong feelings and reactions, white supremacists view this way of thinking as essential to maintaining “natural order” (Vander Zanden 1959, 402). For white supremacists, racial integration and desegregation go against the tradition of maintaining the natural order between whites and blacks. Nevertheless, at the Neshoba County Fair, an “unspoken” tradition involves racial exclusion to preserve its white identity and segregation status. The parallels between white supremacy and common ideologies at the Neshoba County Fair are apparent and illustrate a clear link between the two.

Research Contributions

While there is considerable research conducted on the racial theories discussed in this work, there is a lack of detailed investigations into the racist practices of the Neshoba County Fair. The research conducted in this study— an analysis of a series of interviews at

the Neshoba County Fair— plus an extensive study of the related literature, aims to illustrate the dangers of white spaces, the generational and evolutionary passage of racial bias and distortion, and the importance to the fairgoers to maintain— even racist— traditions. Detailed interviews in this study highlight the dangers and consequences of Fair’s continuation as a white social space. Not only do white spaces manifest feelings of white superiority, but they also have societal implications and encourage covert prejudice.

Decades of racial exclusion led to expansive consequences such as engendering Black fatigue, continual de facto segregation, and racial inequality. Next, there is a lack of substantial scholarship regarding how the Fair continues to exist as a white space. This study contributes a broader discussion and picture of generational racism at the Neshoba County Fair and how it serves as a driver for the maintenance of white spaces. Decades of generation racism subject racism to evolution, and it, in turn, takes on various forms. Maintaining traditions at the Fair is integral for many fairgoers. That said, a historical Fair tradition involves excluding non-white individuals from the Fair. However, over time, the exclusionary practices have become more covert.

Research Limitations

Although the research conducted at the Fair significantly contributes to the field, there are limitations. The investigation consists of twelve 30-60-minute-long interviews undertaken by fairgoers. One limitation is that the interviews were performed on only white individuals. While some Black individuals attend the Fair for entertainment and employment purposes, their presence is absent in cabins and within the social environment. Although Black individuals are welcome to visit the Neshoba County Fair,

Black families do not own fair cabins and, therefore, cannot “engage” with the Fair’s historical social scene. Nevertheless, there are no alternative racial perspectives besides analyzing the existing literature. Subsequent interviews with non-White individuals could have provided a more comprehensive look into ideological differences—regarding the Fair— among races. Additionally, there is a possibility that the information provided in the interviews was limited and may not fully represent the various beliefs felt by fairgoers. Also, there is a geographic limitation, as the Fair is divided into two parts: cabins and RVs. There were no interviews conducted with fairgoers who reside on the RV side, who may have varying traditions and beliefs that differ from those of conventional fairgoers.

CHAPTER III Interviews at the 2023 Neshoba County Fair

Hypothetical Racial Integration at the Neshoba County Fair

Fairgoers value tradition and heritage, including the Fair's white identity. These results also illustrate the presence of evolutionary, intergenerational racism. Younger fairgoers indicated an overreliance on their older family members' ideological stance(s) regarding the Fair's racial makeup and demographics. To give readers an accurate idea of the ideological positions taken at the Neshoba County Fair, interviewed participants were asked specific questions. To provide an overall context to their responses, they were initially asked a hypothetical question: "What do you think the reaction would be from fairgoers if a Black family purchased a Fair cabin and integrated into the Fair; do you think it would be positive?"

The question puzzled some interviewees, while others were eager to respond. Interviewee A (2023) argued, "No, I think they would run off, actually, but I do not think it would even be possible for them to purchase a Fair cabin in the first place." Other interviewees took a more radical approach under their anonymity. For example, Interviewee B (2023) contends, "No, I know so many people who would be pissed off because that is not how things or people are here. It is our tradition." Similarly, Interviewee C (2023) holds that Black individuals cannot purchase a fair cabin. They argued, when asked about the possibility of a Black family purchasing a cabin and integrating into the Fair, "I believe that they cannot (from what I understand); there are a lot of remnants of the Confederacy around here, and I know some people who literally might target them." Clearly, some fairgoers would have an adverse reaction to Black integration at the Fair. Several interviewees argued that their stance "was not personal"

but instead was to maintain the Fair's historical tradition(s) and heritage. Interviewee E (2023) notes that conservative barriers contribute to these potentially dangerous situations. They argue that "the conservative barriers present at the Fair would heighten violence" if that situation were to occur. Some participants took a more neutral stance. Interviewee E (2023) sees no efforts to catalyze integration and improve racial tensions. They argue, "I believe that the reaction from Whites would be very negative. I feel like it could be more normalized over time, but there are no steps towards integration. No one here wants integration."

On the other hand, some interviewees believed that desegregation at the Fair would result in minimal reactions from fairgoers, noting that many would not care. Interviewee D illustrated the most "accepting" response. Although they believe the fairgoers should preserve the Fair's white identity, Interviewee D (2023) argued, "If a Black family successfully purchased a Fair cabin, then I believe that they would be 100% accepted." Interviewee D (2023) adds, "If the Black family truly feels comfortable here at the Fair, then I do not see any pushback from White fairgoers." Because Interviewee D's response was an outlier, they were proposed a different proposition. Interviewee D was asked if they genuinely believed that a Black family would feel comfortable at the Fair. "I believe that if they chose to come to the Fair, then they know the situation here. They should already anticipate the lack of diversity."

While there seems to be some hope for racial integration, it appears that many fairgoers, even less conservative ones, understand the difficulty for desegregation to occur. However, some participants spoke out against the Fair's ongoing racial prejudice. Interviewee F (2023) argues, "I can confidently say that they would not be accepted, and

it might be dangerous. It is unbelievable and unacceptable in this age, but they are still not welcome at the Fair.” Again, while some fairgoers are comfortable with demographic changes, they highlight the hesitancy of the Fair. Interviewee E maintained a similar stance to Interviewee F regarding the potential for racial progress at the Neshoba County Fair. “Mississippi is overwhelmingly conservative, and while there is much racial diversity, I do not believe that Black people are welcome at the Fair. I do not see that changing,” Interviewee E argues.

Stemming from that hypothetical question, each participant was asked to expand on their answer. Additionally, they were asked about the possibility of violence erupting as a response to the hypothetical. Again, participants were either hesitant or eager to respond. Interviewee E (2023) opened up about this possibility, arguing, “Yes, I believe that the initial reaction would be very violent. There would certainly be issues among the White fairgoers.” While it is not abundantly clear what those exact issues might be, it is certainly possible that race is the defining catalyst. Some participants took an extreme approach to this question, garnering some concern over the generational passage of racist ideologies. Interviewee C (2023) argues, regarding the integration becoming violent, “Yes, I think that it would be violent. I do not think they would get burned at the stake, though. But it would be rough. I can see people throwing empty beer cans and trash at the family’s cabin or something like that.”

Interviewee C’s response presents a striking similarity to scare tactics used during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s regarding racial integration into white neighborhoods and spaces. Why are these ideologies continuing to thrive at the Neshoba County Fair decades later? Other interviewees provided similar responses. Interviewee A

(2023), while more reserved, argued, “I don't know, but I do not think that is something that could be ruled out. It would not be the safest.” Similarly, Interviewee F (2023) argued, “I think that the reaction would be violent from some fairgoers.” Nevertheless, through the participants’ statements, the consensus regarding the possibility of violence is that cruelty is feasible, especially among some fairgoers.

White Identity at the Neshoba County Fair

Why is racial integration and desegregation still a problem at the Fair in 2024, and what has allowed this anomaly to continue? Many participants signaled tradition and *generational beliefs* as the root cause for the Fair’s ongoing white identity. Their responses indicate that intergenerational racism, which exists for the maintenance of tradition, is conceivable. Almost verbatim, Interviewee B (2023) argued that “one of the Fair’s traditions is maintaining its white identity.” At the Fair, it is evident that many believe that its white identity is part of its history, tradition, and heritage, leading to generational pressures to upkeep this characteristic. Interviewee J (2023) argued that “Tradition is everything at the Fair, and some people believe that keeping the Fair white is the most important one.” While racial exclusivity is not the only Fair tradition, it is perhaps the most striking and often the most ignored. Interviewee B (2023) contended that the Fair belongs to whites, arguing, “This is our fair. Our tradition.” Said interviewees' honesty presents a striking possibility: the belief that many white fairgoers believe that the Fair “belongs” to them.

Consequently, Interviewee G (2023) holds, regarding the Fair’s continued tradition of whiteness: “I think it is this way because that is just how we have always done it – all Whites, no Blacks. I think there is a word for it, but I do not know. It is our tradition.”

Again, like other participants, Interviewee G presented an example of the ultra-importance of tradition in maintaining the Fair's white identity. One interviewee noted that non-white cultures are not welcomed at the Neshoba County Fair, which preserves its overt white identity. Interviewee E (2023) argued that "urban black culture is not welcome at the Fair." However, Interviewee E suggests that Black individuals who "dress" with white, fair culture could be accepted into the social scene, promoting some integration. Nevertheless, Interviewee E makes a convincing argument regarding how the Fair's white identity could shift. However, for Black Americans and other non-white individuals, potential racial integration within the Fair's social scene could result in cultural masking.

Examining Tradition at the Fair

The theme of tradition was recurring throughout many of the interviews. For example, each interviewee was asked about the possibility of the younger generation (Gen-Z) stimulating and catalyzing racial progress at the Fair. Do you believe that Gen-Z will have a significant enough impact on racial equity and ongoing generational racism at the Neshoba County Fair? Many interviewees signaled a possibility of change arising. However, others were comfortably hesitant. Interviewee C (2023), for example, argued, "I do not think there will be a change, to be honest. This is their tradition, and the people here will do whatever it takes to keep it White."

Similarly, Interviewee E (2023) sees no change on the horizon with the younger generation(s), and they cite one reason: the influence of older family members. They assert, "I just believe that the older generation at the Fair is so stuck in their ways that it impacts how the younger generations see things." Several additional interviewees note

that older generations at the Fair are “stuck in their ways.” As a result, racial progress and integration at the fair are likely not feasible. That said, the Fair hosts thousands of young people yearly. “Overall, the younger generation is way more open-minded and accepting, but I do believe several young fairgoers would resist change because of older generations,” Interviewee E (2023) argues. Interviewee L (2023) believes that younger generations could become more inclusive, but it largely depends on the family. “I see the younger generations at the Fair as more accepting, but it will depend on certain families’ beliefs on the subject.” Interviewee L (2023) adds that “some families at the Fair still view African Americans as awful and probably still believe that they should be slaves.” Because of this, the interviewee is skeptical that progress will transpire. Interviewee L is apprehensive about said racial integration at the Fair because of possible “violence” from some white fairgoers. Similarly, Interviewee E (2023) argues, “While I do think that there are a few younger fairgoers who would be more accepting, I do not think that is conducive to the majority.”

The participants' responses illustrate the sheer power of generational ideologies passed through families for the sake of a tradition. The pressure of younger generations to uphold the Fair’s traditions, including its white identity, considerably influences their beliefs. Nevertheless, this ongoing cycle of generational pressure has stagnated the Fair, leaving it totally segregated and overtly white. On the other hand, some fairgoers are more optimistic about the younger generation(s) catalyzing racial progress at the Neshoba County Fair. Interviewee F (2023) believes that change is possible, but there will need to be a realization among fairgoers that racially exclusionary practices are not ethical and moral. They argue, “Maybe, but I think it would take a lot. I do not think that can be

ruled out, though. People are starting to notice that this is not okay.” Interviewee K (2023) emphasizes the importance of generational traditions at the Neshoba County Fair, and they have encouraged their children to uphold similar beliefs to preserve the Fair’s long-standing traditions. That said, Interviewee K (2023) notes that change is coming. They stated, “10 years ago, racial integration would have been impossible here, but I believe that the younger generation is promoting racial inclusion at the Fair.”

Symbiosis: Tradition and De Facto Segregation at the Fair

Several interviewees say a direct relationship exists between maintaining and preserving tradition and de facto segregation at the Fair. Interviewee F (2023) argues that Fair’s case of de facto segregation “is the direct result of tradition.” Moreover, the Fair started as segregated, and because of the generational pressure to preserve specific traditions, its white identity has persisted. Interviewee H has reservations about the relationship between tradition and de facto segregation at the Fair. While they argue that they “do not see any non-White individuals consistently in the Fair’s social scene,” they note that the Fair’s pattern of racial exclusion is wrong. Interviewee H (2023) highlights how oppressive and consequential the Fair can be for non-White, predominantly Black individuals.

Examining Social Strata at the Neshoba County Fair

Several interviewees emphasized the importance of the relationship between the long-standing social scene and tradition in the Fair. Interviewee F (2023) argued that, historically, the “social scene at the Fair has been controlled by Caucasians because there are no other nationalities or ethnicities present.” Whites have controlled the social makeup of the Fair for a century, and several interviewees report no foreseeable changes.

“We have always been segregated here for a number of reasons,” Interviewee F (2023) argues. However, Interviewee F (2023) suggests that if Black Americans feel disenfranchised by the residential and social exclusion at the Fair, “they should set up their own Fair like the Choctaws.” Other interviewees had similar answers regarding the Fair’s continual “white-dominated” social strata. Interviewee H (2023) also refers to the “past” as a driver of the Fair’s continual white identity. The Fair’s past is primarily characterized by White nationalism, segregation, and political and racial hostility. While Black individuals have, according to Interviewee H (2023), been historically not accepted at the Neshoba County Fair, they believe that Black individuals are now “accepted” despite continual patterns of microaggressions and covert racist behavior. They argue, “I feel like Black individuals in the community feel like they are not accepted here because of the past, but I wish they knew they were accepted here.” Interviewee H’s response was distinctive compared to the rest of the cohort; however, the interview illustrates an outlier at the Fair, which, over time, could have positive implications on social integration and sincere racial acceptance and equity.

Race at the Neshoba County Fair

Is race discussed at the Neshoba County Fair, or is it a taboo? This thesis posed a question aimed at capturing, on a small scale, the entanglement between the absence of racial discussions and the continuation of micro-aggressive racist practices and segregation at the Fair. Interviewee A (2023) believes that the discussion of race at the Fair needs to be more present. They argue, “I have never heard anyone talk about race at the Fair other than by my partner’s mother to explain how Blacks are welcome at the Fair.” They add, “Clearly, Blacks are not welcome at the Fair because they are not here.”

Discussing race at the Fair is essential because it allows for questions and rebuttals.

Because discussion at the Fair is described as “illicit,” progress regarding civil rights and racial equality is unlikely. Without conversations, fairgoers are likely to continue the cycle of intergenerational racism and racial disenfranchisement.

Assessing Diversity at the Neshoba County Fair

The Neshoba County Fair exists as a white space. While non-White individuals exist at the Fair in employment positions, White individuals dominate and control the social and residential environment within the establishment. While interviewees described more “general” diversity within day-to-day activities at the Fair over time, they maintained that the Fair is still residentially and socially segregated. Interviewee I (2023) argued that while there is some diversity, it is limited to employment positions. They say, “The only African Americans present at the Fair are political candidates, their staff, and those working in concessions.” One interviewee noted that Black individuals also participate in horse races— as jockeys— and aid in maintaining the Fair’s cleanliness. Interviewee E (2023) stated that the only Black individuals present are reserved for the “harness races as jockeys, racetrack cleanup crew, or maintenance of the horse stables.” Nevertheless, while some diversity is present, it presents a backward case of racial integration, as Whites and Blacks are separated into vastly different realms at the Fair.

CHAPTER IV Analyzing Interdependency between Intergenerational Racism, Tradition, and Racial Discrimination

Intergenerational Racism at the Neshoba County Fair

At the Neshoba County Fair, tradition is of uttermost importance. From recipes to ideological perspectives, many fairgoers value their heritage fully. As discussed, this heritage is primarily rooted in systemic and intergenerational prejudice. When the Fair was founded in the late 1880s, blatant racial prejudice was, arguably, a social norm. During this time, Jim Crow laws were continuing to expand across Mississippi, and racial tensions were rising. As a result, racially exclusionary practices at the Fair were the standard. Over time, however, racial prejudice became less championed in Mississippi. Fairgoers, though, valued the meaning of tradition, and the Fair's prejudiced roots continued to pass through generations disguised in new, covert forms. Most notably, though, fairgoers safeguard the Fair's racially exclusionary practices for the sake of maintaining a tradition or protecting their ancestral heritage. For many fairgoers, the Fair is viewed as a "utopia," and some describe the Fair as a "step back in time." While stepping back into a time plagued by racial inequity and divisions would catalyze apprehension for most, some fairgoers view the Fair's social and racial "backwardness" as nostalgic. One interviewee describes the Fair's social scene as a "perfect preservation of Mississippi and the past" (Interviewee F, 2023). While many traditions are positive and wholesome, the practice of racial exclusion for the sake of maintaining a tradition raises ethical and moral questions. However, the intergenerational movement of beliefs through generations at the Fair allows the practice to continue, leading to one of the more

idiosyncratic cases of de facto segregation in the United States. The Fair's existence as a segregated yet legal residential campground highlights the dangers of intergenerational racism and its influence on the youth population at the Fair. Although older interviewees were hesitant about racial changes at the Fair, younger ones appeared open to change despite the impact of continual intergenerational racism. One seasoned fairgoer who participated in the study noted that "the younger generation at the Fair can socially progress faster than the older generations" (Interviewee E, 2023). While this is likely true, the Fair's reliance on traditions and heritage could hinder racial or social progress in the future. The ongoing continuum of intergenerational prejudice can potentially postpone racial inclusion at the Fair. These practices, through the research conducted in this paper, continue to impact young fairgoers, which was illustrated by the collective interviewee responses.

For almost all participants who attend the Fair regularly, the value of safeguarding "cabin" traditions was significant. Several interviewees argued that the act of racial exclusion was, in fact, one of the more standard practices. However, many interviewees failed to pinpoint why this practice continues to transpire. Instead, they highlighted their heavy reliance on cabin-specific ideological perspectives. These interviewees noted that they valued the ideals of their older family members and friends at the Fair. As a result, several younger interviewees argued that change at the Fair is unlikely due to the continual ideological passage of prejudice. On the other hand, some younger fairgoers believe that racial progress at the Fair is likely, especially as Mississippi continues to become more diverse. While the change will be gradual, some fairgoers see racial integration at the Fair as inevitable.

“Neshobism”

In Mississippi, the Neshoba County Fair has a divisive reputation. On one hand, some Mississippians view the Fair as “Mississippi’s Giant House party.” From the concerts and social scene to the art shows to the horse races and midway rides, the Fair, superficially, can be seen as a place of joy and entertainment. The brightly colored cabins and warmly lit streets draw in thousands of yearly visitors who relish the idea of owning a fair cabin. On the other hand, some individuals view it as a place of exclusion and prejudice, as it has safeguarded its existence as a white space for over a century. From Ross Barnett to Ronald Reagan, the Neshoba County Fair has historically been a place where politicians have promoted racially discriminatory attitudes. Famously, in 1980, Ronald Reagan gave his states’ rights speech at the Neshoba County Fair. In his speech at the Fair—where Reagan catalyzed his bid for the presidency—he used “code” language to appeal to White supremacists and prejudiced individuals in the crowd. Reagan utilized covert “dog whistling” to disguise any explicit racial prejudice while appealing to racist individuals in the crowd (Torices 2021, 321). Similarly, there have been other politicians, over the years, who have used the Fair to manipulate prejudiced attitudes for political gain. James K. Vardaman, a former Mississippi Governor during the early twentieth century, compared Black Mississippians to “hogs” to gain political support and votes from fairgoers (Jackson Free Press, 2006, 1). Again, Ross Barnett used anti-Black rhetoric to appeal to voters and gain political support in the 1960s. Barnett was a strong segregationist who strongly opposed racial integration, so the Fair was an ideal place for the former Governor to gain traction and recognition. In recent years, the Fair has attracted divisive politicians to speak. In 2016, Donald Trump Jr. attended the Neshoba

County Fair and spoke on behalf of his father. Since then, the Neshoba County Fair has become an environment that fosters the ideals of MAGA. The continual influx of prejudiced and divisive politicians, in addition to over a century of racial segregation and exclusion, has branded the Fair as a place reluctant to change and of oppression.

While this paper focuses on the intergenerational passage of racial beliefs, it is worth noting that the intrafamilial maintenance of political perspectives exists. Nevertheless, the two— intergenerational racism and politics— work symbiotically at the Fair to cycle divisive and extremist right politicians in and out while also encouraging the acceptance of some racially exclusionary positions. Younger generations adopting racially biased and discriminatory ideologies and political positions are the result of intergenerational racism and politics working together. At the Fair, this allows politicians to capitalize off the conservative, traditional, and racially prejudiced ideologies of some fairgoers.

Over time, fairgoers' discriminatory practices, behaviors, and ideologies have evolved to adapt to new social standards. However, the entanglement between the Neshoba County Fair and racial exclusion still exists. While racist and micro-aggressive attitudes at the Fair are becoming more covert, the segregation patterns are unconcealed and shameless. The segregational shamelessness at the Fair contributes to the continuation of prejudiced tendencies and ideologies. Nevertheless, when combined, the evolutionary generational racism and segregational shamelessness at the Fair have fostered an environment of “unbeknownst” racism. “Unbeknownst” racism, in this project, refers to the action of unknowingly carrying out micro-aggressive racist practices. In the case of the Fair, the subliminal racist actions undertaken by fairgoers—

like the maintenance of racist traditions and ideological perspectives— often occur for the sake of maintaining the Fair’s earliest traditions. Some fairgoers, based on the results of the interviews, appear to be blinded by tradition when discussing racial inequity and segregation at the Neshoba County Fair. The Neshoba County Fair is segregated because “that is how the Fair has always been.”

Nevertheless, residential and social segregation has become the standard at the Neshoba County Fair, leading to its normality and staunch acceptance. The regularity and normality of racial exclusion— to preserve the Fair’s tradition as a white space— has contributed to the continuation of racial inequity, Black Fatigue, white fragility, and covert racism. With that being said, the historical preservation of tradition at the Fair catalyzes racist attitudes and beliefs. However, as illustrated in several interviews, some fairgoers who hold racially biased beliefs regarding the Fair illustrate a failure to accept or acknowledge any prejudice. During the interview process, several interviewees accepted that the “standard” belief system at the Fair is backward and problematic. However, the majority failed to note any racial wrongdoings at the Fair.

Nonetheless, the interview process revealed a unique finding regarding the Neshoba County Fair. The evolution of racial attitudes via intergenerational racism at the Fair has produced a unique racial theory. This investigation coins the term “Neshobism,” which describes the belief system and racial attitudes of fairgoers. “Neshobism” refers to the consequence of evolutionary intergenerational racism when mutually coexisting with tradition. When working together, tradition and intergenerational racism mask prejudiced realizations.

Nevertheless, “Neshobists” arguably are unaware of how their behavior contributes to racial inequity in Mississippi and promotes the continual exclusion of non-White individuals at the Neshoba County Fair. Are fairgoers who possess “Neshobist” attitudes to blame for the Fair’s ongoing case of de facto segregation? One aim of this project was to investigate the difference between traditional “racism” and “Neshobism.” How is Neshobism different from racism?

Through the research conducted in this project, this investigation holds that “Neshobists” are indirectly to blame for the Fair’s residential and social segregation. Moreover, Neshobists, unlike conventional racist individuals, are unaware of their behavior and racist ideologies. These individuals engage in behaviors that follow the tradition of their cabins or social scenes within the Fair. Traditions that, likely, have been active for decades. As mentioned, many traditions—because of the repeated passage of racist ideologies through generations—have been subject to evolution. Therefore, blatant racism has been diluted to the point of exterior invisibility. With that said, the interviews illustrated, however, that interior racism within cabins and families exists and continues to contribute to racial and social segregation at the Fair.

Nevertheless, although Neshobists unintentionally promote the continuation of racist traditions at the Fair, their actions should not be considered a form of explicit racism. While hundreds of families covertly engage in micro-aggressive racist attitudes to maintain tradition, very few, arguably, are traditionally and blatantly racist. As one interviewee suggests, preserving the Fair’s traditions is critical and encouraged by older generations. As a result, there is an “unspoken” rule to preserve intra-cabin traditions for many families, which explains how cabins often stay in families for generations.

Additionally, “Neshobism” differs from traditional racism because the behavior and attitudes of Neshobists are not aimed to disenfranchise or discriminate against non-White individuals intentionally. Instead, “Neshobism” is essentially a result of social and familial pressures to maintain specific traditions, traditions that covertly discriminate against non-White—specifically Black—individuals. However, because these behaviors have become the internal standard throughout the Fair, racial exclusion and disenfranchisement have persisted and functioned. The most visible result of these practices is the Fair's continuation as a white space, residentially and socially. While some interviewees highlight the presence of non-White individuals at the Fair in employment positions and for entertainment purposes, there is a clear understanding that racial integration is ignored within the residential and social scene. Almost total inconsideration of residential and social-racial integration within the Fair is highlighted in several interview responses. Within the interviewees, social and residential racial integration is unheard of. The position of many fairgoers, as illustrated earlier in the project, on racial integration results from decades of evolutionary generational racism and Black Fatigue. As mentioned by one interviewee, some younger fairgoers are encouraged to believe that the Fair is segregated not because of impossibility but rather because of averseness and refusal from non-White individuals. While it is likely true that Black and other non-White individuals are apathetic towards the Fair, it is the consequence of decades of racial segregation and prejudice. Moreover, decades of blatant racial exclusion— as illustrated through practices like political stump speeches and familial pressures to maintain tradition— have contributed to an expansive case of Black Fatigue. Because White politicians have used the Fair to target non-White individuals and appeal

to voters with prejudiced belief systems for decades, it has signaled to non-White individuals that it safeguards traditionally racist values and ideologies. Moreover, the absence of racial diversity might appear as an external understanding between non-White and White individuals; however, the Fair's continual segregation status has resulted in consequences. Black Fatigue, for example, might be a consequence of the continual preservation of racially exclusionary practices at the Fair. Nevertheless, continual Black fatigue within the community and across Mississippi, relating to the Fair, would explain the lack of activism against the establishment. Moreover, this unspoken "mutual" agreement between White fairgoers and non-White community members is not the result of affability. Instead, it is the consequence of decades of racial exclusion and Black Fatigue.

Accessing "Neshobism" as a Conglomeration of Racial Theories

"Neshobism" is a conglomeration of several racial theories. With that being said, the "Neshobists" that were interviewed for this thesis presented characteristics of white fragility when pressed on the issue of racism at the Fair. While several noted that the Fair's de facto segregation was strange, they did not believe it was wrong. Instead, they described the Fair's racial makeup because of a mutual understanding between White fairgoers and non-White individuals. Nevertheless, from their perspective, "Neshobists" view the segregation at the Fair as acceptable and equitable because that is what they have been taught and encouraged to believe. However, when discussing the adverse impact of exclusionary racism—specifically on Black Americans—several interviewees explained that the Fair's segregational history likely has a substantial influence on non-white individuals' ideologies regarding the establishment.

There is a mutual relationship between covert racism and “Neshobism.” The repetitive movement of racially discriminatory intergenerational ideologies and the consequent evolution over time has acted as a catalyst for preserving the Fair’s white identity. Because the preservation of tradition often blinds Neshobists, covert racist practices at the Fair have become more commonplace. From rebel flags draped across balconies to employment demographics at the Fair, many micro-aggressive and covert practices are fostered. One interviewee alluded to young Black individuals picking up trash around the Fair’s horse racetrack in the early morning hours before fairgoers woke up. Another interviewee highlighted the number of Black women as housekeepers in a few cabins. The 60s-esque racial atmosphere at the Fair raises concerns over racial equitability; however, Neshobists see the presence of Black individuals in these positions as standard for the Fair.

Although there is a small presence of Black individuals at the Fair, they are primarily excluded from the residential and social scenes. According to several interviewees, predominantly from neighboring communities, Black individuals often appear in hospitality positions at the Fair, mainly as cabin maids. While external visitors notice racial exclusion, fairgoers appear blind to the disenfranchisement that transpires. Neshobists are unaware of their covert racism and its results because of decades of evolutionary intergenerational racism and the maintenance of an internal system of structural racism. Moreover, for the sake of maintaining familial traditions, some fairgoers display heirlooms, which, at the Fair, can be in the form of racist propaganda. However, as established, some fairgoers– Neshobists– are blind to the dangers of their actions and ideologies, contributing to the ongoing case of Black Fatigue. Employment

“standards” and micro-aggressive displays influence the magnitude of Black Fatigue experienced by some Black individuals about the Fair. These behaviors have existed for generations, and many interviewees are hesitant about the Fair’s ability to progress racially. Nevertheless, the Black Fatigue experienced by community members and others across the State is arguably very strong and efficacious. Consequently, in addition to the Fair’s evolving patterns of racism, Neshobists believe the Fair’s demographics are a result of ethical correspondence and racial acquiescence. Because of this unspoken “relationship,” the Fair has flourished without significant discourse and protest.

Working symbiotically with covert racism, white supremacy plays a role in preserving traditions and maintaining “Neshobist” principles. While the fundamental ideals of white supremacy have been diluted over time, some principles persist. Like white supremacists, Neshobists relate the Fair’s white identity to tradition and heritage. For white supremacists, racial segregation is the result of natural order. The relationship between the two revolves around maintaining white identity or white spaces for the sake of tradition and natural order. While white supremacy and Neshobism are not mutually exclusive, the two can fuse and become entangled. However, Neshobists are not functional white supremacists; instead, they unknowingly engage in behaviors that evolved directly from white supremacy. By adopting certain generational traditions at the Fair, some individuals are indirectly preserving and validating white supremacy at the Neshoba County Fair.

During the interview process, interviewees were vocal about the Fair’s relationship with racial integration and the possibility of change in the future. While some interviewees were hopeful, some participants argued against racial evolution at the Fair.

Instead, some believed the Fair will “always” remain the same regarding diversity and inclusion. The continual pattern of intergenerational racism for the sake of tradition has skewed belief systems for Neshobists. The result of this continual cycle has created a lack of awareness of racial disenfranchisement at the Neshoba County Fair and how its internal social behaviors might influence race relations in Mississippi. Moreover, the Neshoba County Fair could be viewed as a microcosm of Mississippi and other parts of the United States. Perhaps “Neshobism,” on a much smaller scale, illustrates how racism continues to function and flourish across the United States. With increased diversity, equity, and inclusion rates across the country in almost all social, educational, and residential spaces, many places still harbor prejudice. On a larger scale, tradition and intergenerational racism work together to mask the passage of prejudice from one generation to another, as pressures from older family members to maintain certain traditions are present. For example, harmful ideologies associated with miscegenation among White Americans are commonly subject to intergenerational passages, especially in the South. Because parents and grandparents have certain beliefs about miscegenation, it is often passed on to susceptible young individuals. As a result, a generational pattern of anti-miscegenation develops, and a tradition of preserving a family's white identity emerges. As a result, negative racial stereotypes and ideologies are produced, prompting the continual cycle of racism. Like the Fair, this intergenerational prejudice is a result of the act of preserving a specific tradition. Nevertheless, “Neshobism” illustrates how racism can covertly persist. Because traditions are often integral for many families and groups, individuals are often blinded by tradition. Because of this, racial awareness and equitability can be easily ignored, catalyzing the continuation of the prejudiced cycle.

The Dangers of “Neshobism” on Society

The dangers of “Neshobism” are not derived from its extent of prejudice. The sublimity of the intergenerational passage of racist traditions is what heightens the dangers of the practices undertaken at the Fair. Because the familial ideological passage has been subject to decades of evolution, it has adapted to new social norms. With that being said, the “new” diluted racist practices at the Fair are equally as dangerous as the rhetoric that surrounded the Fair pre-Freedom Summer of 1964. Nevertheless, the consequences of the Fair’s covert yet racially exclusionary practices are expansive, especially on easily impressionable youth.

As indicated by several interviewees, the youth at the Fair’s interdependence on traditional beliefs and familial heritage is significant. Because Neshobism is built upon the principle of unbeknownst racism, it is possible for young “Neshobists” to engage in similar Fair-related behaviors outside the establishment unknowingly. In turn, these “location-specific” behaviors could influence the ideological nature of their peers, resulting from the lack of awareness from Neshobists. Because young individuals are typically ideologically susceptible, new “Neshobists” could apply the behaviors and practices undertaken at the Fair to their daily lives. Nevertheless, because racial segregation has been accepted and preserved at the Neshoba County Fair, ideological perspectives regarding accepting racial segregation for the sake of “tradition” in other social environments could be validated. During the interview process, one interviewee highlighted the presence of similar cases of de facto segregation in Mississippi. Interviewee I references segregated social clubs, fraternities and sororities, country clubs,

private— formerly segregation academies— schools, and residential communities as instances of legalized and persistent cases of segregation.

Similarly, these instances of de facto segregation might persist due to the importance of maintaining certain traditions. Many of the cases referenced began segregated— like the Neshoba County Fair— and, for the most part, have maintained their white identity, especially in Mississippi. Private schools, fraternities, sororities, and certain social clubs are the standard for many wealthy Southern families.

Intergenerational ideological passages occur to maintain the “traditional” white identity of these spaces. This project holds that these spaces— private schools, fraternities and sororities, elite social clubs, etc.— are subject to intergenerational racism to maintain their existence as white spaces. “Neshobism” illustrates the new era of racism in the United States. The racism that many individuals unknowingly engage in is due to decades of evolutionary intergenerational racism. The new approach to racism for many in the United States is, in fact, the absence of an approach. Individuals across the country unknowingly engage in behaviors that promote and preserve the existence of white spaces. While some Americans engage in more prejudiced behaviors, “Neshobists” lack malice. Instead, they do what is commonplace and traditionally welcomed because of certain learned behaviors.

CHAPTER V Findings and Conclusion

There are several vital findings this project notes. First, there exists an interdependency between tradition and intergenerational racism at the Neshoba County Fair. For traditions to continue, intergenerational racism— the passage of racist ideologies through generations— must occur to maintain the Fair’s white identity and segregation status. Next, the Neshoba County Fair presents a relationship between tradition and racial exclusion. There appears to be a tradition of preserving the Fair’s white identity by excluding non-White individuals from the Fair. This is apparent through micro-aggressive behaviors and ideologies held by fairgoers and the Neshoba County Fair itself. Several interviewees view the continual hanging of the rebel flag as a cabin tradition; however, erecting the rebel flag each year is a continual act of racial exclusion. Finally, this investigation finds that intergenerational racism can be subject to evolution. While “traditional” forms of racism exist at the Fair, evolutionary intergenerational racism has catalyzed the dilution of racism, leading to more “acceptable” variants of prejudice. “Neshobism” is the result of continual evolutionary intergenerational racism for the sake of maintaining a tradition, triggering unbeknownst racism.

Undoubtedly, the Neshoba County Fair is a unique place. This investigation sought to unveil answers surrounding the Fair’s segregational preservation and white identity. Nevertheless, through a series of descriptive interviews in addition to secondary research, it is evident that racism at the Neshoba County Fair differs from traditional racism. At the Fair, tradition, intergenerational racism, and racial exclusion come together to symbiotically, yet discreetly, maintain the Fair’s identity as a white space. In addition, evolutionary intergenerational racism acts to shelter and safeguard historical

racist traditions by attenuating racism itself. In conclusion, this investigation coins the theory of “Neshobism” to categorize intergenerational racism that is subject to evolution and used to preserve prejudiced traditions.

APPENDIX A INTERVIEW PROCESS AND DESCRIPTIONS

The interviews conducted in this study are anonymous, and identifiable characteristics were only documented upon approval. The interviewees' minor characteristics are age range, relationship to the Fair, and gender. Twelve participants agreed to engage in one 30-60-minute interview at the Neshoba County Fair. Anonymity is promised in this project due to possible social constraints and consequences for those who voluntarily participated. The interviewees are described by letter, A-L, to conceal their identity.

The participants were asked about the Neshoba County Fair, its history, and its relationship to race. In addition, interviewees were posed a hypothetical question. They were asked: What do you think is the reaction from fairgoers if a Black family purchased a Fair cabin and integrated it into the Fair? Do you think it would be positive?" Other questions involved the importance of tradition, Gen-Z, and possible change at the Fair. The interviewee's critical responses were gathered by note-taking instead of a formal transcription. While this process is more tedious, it was integral to build a rapport with each interviewee and ensure complete anonymity.

APPENDIX B IRB APPROVAL LETTER

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NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

The project below has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University Policy to ensure:

- The risks to subjects are minimized and reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered involving risks to subjects must be reported immediately. Problems should be reported to ORI using the Incident form available in InfoEd.
- The period of approval is twelve months. If a project will exceed twelve months, a request should be submitted to ORI using the Renewal form available in InfoEd prior to the expiration date.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 23-0413
PROJECT TITLE: The Neshoba County Fair: The Truth Behind One of Mississippi's Most Unusual Anomalies
SCHOOL/PROGRAM: Political Science & Legal Studies
RESEARCHERS: PI: William Adams
Investigators: Adams, William~Press, Robert Maxwell~
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Approved
CATEGORY: Expedited Category
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 11-Jul-2023 to 10-Jul-2024

Alen Hajnal, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Vice Chairperson

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