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Black, White, and Red All Over: Tougaloo College and the Southern Red Scare

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Black, White, and Red All Over: Tougaloo College and the Southern Red Scare

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to explain the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission's use of red baiting tactics against civil rights activists. Civil rights activists in Mississippi weathered countless physical, economic, and reputational attacks. The movement took off during the 1950s at the same time as the nation entered the Cold War. White supremacist southerners fought to preserve segregation through violent and nonviolent means. As the rest of the nation slowly came out of Cold War-fueled hysteria known as the second red scare, segregationists in the south were influenced by it. They cast the entire civil rights movement as a Communist plot to overthrow America. Dubbed by historian Jeff Woods as the "southern red scare," this blend of anti-Communist and pro-segregationist sentiment combined concerns over national security with those of southern identity and white supremacy.[1] At the time, one of the most contentious battlegrounds over Jim Crow was Mississippi.[2] For Black people, any mistake or defiance could be deadly.[3]

Like many at the time, Clyde Kennard and the students at Tougaloo College chose to defy social order. Tougaloo was a private black college whose unique set up facilitated a culture of progressivism. It became an important place where activists could gather resources, and students and faculty participated in the movement directly. This activity soon drew the attention of the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, who sought to

[1] Jeff Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South, 1948-1968*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University) 1-5.
[2] John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*, (Champaign: University of Illinois Press), 9.
[3] Woods, *Black Struggle*, 6.

destroy it.[4] Tougaloo's president, white liberal Dr. A.D. Beittel, made himself a target with his support of activism on campus. His downfall would signal the end of Tougaloo's golden era of activism.[5]

Years earlier in a different part of the state, veteran and aspiring college graduate Clyde Kennard tried to apply to Mississippi Southern College. His actions prompted a months-long campaign from the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission to stop him, either through shaming or smearing his name. Kennard's refusal to back down led to him being convicted for crimes he did not commit. He ultimately died of cancer after being denied treatment while in prison. His story is considered one of the many tragedies of the civil rights era.[6]

This paper seeks to draw a connection between the segregationists' anti-Communist viewpoint and the downfall of Kennard and Dr. Biettel's presidency at Tougaloo. The "communist" label added some legitimacy to southern segregationists' arguments, enough for many to shy away from the movement and those involved. It was this fear of being labeled by the association that caused Brown University, who wanted to enter a partnership with Tougaloo, to work with Tougaloo's board of trustees to fire Beittel ahead of securing an important grant. In Kennard's case, it influenced the commission's attacks against him. The sovereignty commission's attacks on Clyde

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[4] Joy Ann Williamson, *Radicalizing the Ebony Tower: Black Colleges and the Black Freedom Struggle in Mississippi* (New York: Teachers College Press), 7.

[5] Maria R. Lowe, "An 'Oasis of Freedom' in a 'Closed Society': The Development of Tougaloo College as a Free Space in Mississippi's Civil Rights Movement, 1960 to 1964," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 20, no. 4 (December 2007), 509-510.

[6] Minchin, Timothy J. and John A. Salmond, "'The Saddest Story of the Whole Movement': The Clyde Kennard Case and the Search for Racial Reconciliation in Mississippi, 195-2007," *The Journal of Mississippi History* 71, no. 3 (Fall 2009), 196-197.

Kennard and Tougaloo College exposed how the civil rights movement had no substantial defense against red baiting.

Keywords: civil rights movement, Clyde Kennard, Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, The University of Southern Mississippi, Tougaloo College, Dr. A.D. Biettel,

DEDICATION

I dedicate this paper to my friends and family for their endless support.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS x

CHAPTER I: SEEING RED 1

Introduction 1

Literature Review 2

The Southern Way of Life 16

The Red and White Menace 20

The Southern Way of Life 23

CHAPTER II: THE STUDENT 25

"Yet, What Other Course Can I Take?" 25

Black and Gold 31

CHAPTER III: THE SCHOOL 35

The Oasis 35

The Desert 38

CHAPTER IV: BLACK, WHITE, AND RED ALL OVER 45

Conclusion 48

Bibliography 49

Primary Sources 49

Secondary Sources 51

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

MSC	Mississippi Southern College
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

SEEING RED

Introduction

Discussions of civil rights history often leave out the influence of the Cold War and America's anti-communist rhetoric. The civil rights movement and the Cold War were concurrent and intertwined events. The civil rights movement sought to combat white supremacy and expand civil rights to Black Americans, especially in the South. At the same time, the United States sought to protect its international reputation and position against the Soviet Union. Both were generation-defining efforts to combat enemies of American democracy, often with similar players and tools. Both inspired a wave of conservative backlash and moral panic, but in different ways.

Second Red Scare was born out of fears of a communist infiltration into the American government and society. By the 1960s, this red scare was winding down nationally. But it took off in the south as white southern segregationists launched their massive resistance to counter the civil rights movement. White segregationists across the south drew a connection between the nation's fight against communism overseas and their fight against civil rights at home. Thus was born the belief that the Soviet Union manufactured the civil rights movement to sow racial discord, weaken American society, and expand federal power. This would set the stage for Communists to topple American democracy from within and install a communist government.

Red baiting was a key tool in segregationists' arsenal. It gave their cause greater legitimacy. They used this to justify their harassment and censorship of activists as simply protecting national security. The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission was established to find, investigate, and suppress civil rights activity. Activists had few

avenues of recourse from these attacks, as they were directed by public officials and other powerful people.

These are the conditions faced by young activists at the university level. The students at Tougaloo College, an esteemed Black private liberal arts college in Jackson, was a hub for organizers, activists, and radical intellectual thought in the 1950s to the 1960s. University president Dr. A.D. Biettel openly supported their movement. But, as the school suffered from financial problems and weathered backlash, the things that made Tougaloo special would also make it vulnerable. Around the same time, Clyde Kennard sought to continue his college career at the local white university, Mississippi Southern College. His attempts to desegregate MSC made him the subject of a massive investigation. This publicity led to him being framed and ultimately losing his life.

Sovereignty commission director Erle Johnston made his mission to take down Dr. Biettel, and with him the movement at Tougaloo. Unbeknownst to him, Tougaloo's board of trustees also feared that Dr. Biettel's allyship to the activists would keep the cash-strapped college from getting an important grant. The circumstances of Beittel's firing inspired a controversy that persists today. Dr. A.D. Biettel was fired because of his allyship to Tougaloo's arm of the civil rights movement, showing how unequipped civil rights activists were to dispel red-baiting attacks from segregationists like the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission.

Literature Review

Reconciling the relationship between the civil rights movement, the southern red scare, and the college activism at Tougaloo starts with understanding the forces working

for and against the movement. John Dittmer's *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* details the history of the local civil rights movement and the opposition to it. Dittmer's book traces the movement's rise from the seeds planted during Reconstruction, the Jim Crow era, and World War II to how it took root during the Brown v Board of Education case and beyond. Throughout, Dittmer notes the interplay between how national events influenced Mississippi and vice versa.[7]

Local People made clear the centrality of everyday people in the movement, including the disadvantages they had. Mississippi's civil rights protests were largely grassroots and focused on shifting the power structure while still having to work under it. As a result, there were more limits on what they could do, what arguments they could and couldn't make. This reality is what made Tougaloo stand out so much, as it operated without regard to many of these restrictions during its heyday.

Throughout *Local People*, Dittmer documented the many efforts white segregationists in Mississippi made to preserve segregation. "For Mississippi whites the U.S. Supreme Court decision had been a wake-up call, and preserving the southern way of life soon assumed all the trappings of a holy crusade," he wrote.[8] The words "preserving" and "holy war" encapsulate the mindset of many white southern segregationists. To them, the rise of racial justice was a direct attack on the southern way of life, an essential part of their culture, identity, and institutions. That fear, combined with absolute belief in the system of white supremacy, was used as justification for the "any means necessary" approach that many segregationists took. Some of their strongest

[7] Dittmer, *Local People*, 9-41.
[8] Dittmer, *Local People,* 41.

tools were the legal and political systems, which white Mississippians had monopolized for generations.[9]

Sarah H. Brown's "The Role of Elite Leadership in the Southern Defense of Segregation, 1954-1964" explores how elite southern segregationists led the charge against civil rights legislation.[10] The specifics varied from state to state but shared some common elements. The segregationists presented a constitutional, legal, or intellectual arguments for segregation. These arguments downplayed race as the primary factor. The upper-class segregationists organized quietly, while working and middle-class segregationists garnered the most attention. Groups formed inter-state alliances. There was a general regional pride and resentment of northerners for looking down on them. Of course, they believed white supremacy was central and necessary for order in southern society.[11] They also made efforts to appeal to national conservatives to legitimize their cause, but their position was not very popular.[12] These elite white southerners were particularly afraid of the movement's ramifications: unrest across the working class, increased federal oversight, and the black vote and integrated schools could all upset the balance of power in the region.[13]

While massive resistance united white supremacists across the south, those with wealth and power drove the movement. White southern, segregationist politicians in all levels of government were responsible for passing legislation, creating agencies like the

[9] Dittmer, *Local People*, 20-22.
[10] Brown, "Elite Leadership," 827.
[11] Brown, "Southern Leadership," 827-829.
[12] Brown, "Southern Leadership," 830-864.
[13] Brown, "Southern Leadership," 828-829.

sovereignty commission, and using legal and political power against activists. This would not have been possible without cooperation from citizens who supported their cause, but it was politicians, business leaders, and other people in positions of power steering the ship.[14] The participation of these wealthy and powerful people gave the movement legitimacy and power that the movement struggled to match. Even without support from national conservatives, they had considerable local power. They used this to terrorize activists at almost every step.[15]

The sovereignty commission was a key player in Mississippi's massive resistance, and any research involving them requires acquaintance with Yasuhiro Katagiri's *The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission: Civil Rights and States Rights.* This book is a comprehensive history of the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission, including its structure, goals, and weaknesses.[16] The commission was founded in 1954 in the wake of the *Brown v Board of Education* ruling.[17] It was an agency of the state government meant to target and suppress civil rights activity. They also worked to improve Mississippi's public image to the rest of the country.[18]

White southern segregationists had state resources at their disposal, which gave them a clear advantage over civil rights activists. The activists had little recourse against the commission's spying, unlawful arrest, intimidation, and other tactics.[19] Through these actions, the commission created an atmosphere of fear. This made it easier for the idea of

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[14] Brown, "Southern Leadership," 827.
[15] Brown, "Southern Leadership," 827.
[16] Katagiri, *Sovereignty Commission*, 5-6.

[17] Katagiri, *Sovereignty Commission*, 3-5.
[18] Katagiri, *Sovereignty Commission,* 8-9.
[19] Katagiri, *Sovereignty Commission*, 69

the southern red scare to catch on. While Katagiri does not mention this idea in this book, he does establish how the commission worked to make the state inhospitable for activists.

Michael J. Butler's "The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission and Beach Integration, 1959-1963: A Cotton-Patch Gestapo?" further illustrates the sovereignty commission's power of terror. The article tells the story of Dr. Gilbert Mason's attempts to desegregate the whites-only beach in Harrison County, Mississippi. Dr. Mason's actions caught the attention of the sovereignty commission. One of their agents, Zack Van Landingham, worked with local police and white residents to subvert the desegregation efforts. They used various methods for this: harassment, blacklisting, threats of violence, and loss of jobs. They even intimidated the leader of Gulfport's NAACP, Dr. Felix Dunn, to become an informant. Despite the numerous threats and lack of community support, Dr. Mason and his allies led the first beach protest on April 17, 1960. They were met with physical attacks and condemnation. It took years, but Dr. Mason ultimately prevailed. The U.S. The Justice Department sued the county over the segregated beaches in 1960 and won in 1972.[20]

This story is a great example of how the commission was part of a larger culture of fear and intimidation surrounding the race in Mississippi. This left less room for activists to push for change while empowering white citizens and authorities to use state power to terrorize anyone who stepped out of line. As a result, many people bent to their will out of fear. The choice to stand up wasn't easy for a lot of people, and activists had no real way of making up for it. Take the case of Dr. Dunn. Dunn was initially an activist,

[20] J. Michael Butler, "The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission and Beach Integration, 1959-1963: A Cotton-Patch Gestapo?" *The Journal of Southern History* 68, no. 1 (2002), 107–48, https://doi.org/10.2307/3069692.

but ultimately chose to preserve himself over the cause. The legal and political systems were controlled by whites, so there was little to no recourse for those who stuck their necks out. Dr. Dunn, Dr. Mason, and the others involved likely knew this.

This culture of fear and intimidation defined the second red scare era. Geordie Jeakins's "Ominous Communist Fifth Columnists: The Making of McCarthyism and the Second Red Scare" explains the background on the Cold War and the second red scare. The social unrest of the early 19th century - mainly the labor movement and the Russian Revolution - set the stage for the post-World War II Red Scare.[21] In the post-war years, any group or opinion that was seen as validating Communist causes was considered "subversive." These fears were further validated by international developments in Korea and other countries. The combination of domestic and international problems set the stage for an American panic.[22]

This source provides a broader context on the Cold War conditions within the United States. It's clear there were several similarities between the second red scare and the culture of fear in the south during Jim Crow. Both were rooted in a fear of perceived outsiders working with subversives within the community to topple it from within. Both showed how many Americans were afraid of the balance of power tipping out of their favor. Both were examples of government power being used to oppress anti-establishment ideas.

Jeff Woods' *Black Struggle, Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South, 1948-1968* shows how the segregationists in the south used anti-Communist

[21] Geordie Jeakins, "Ominous Communist Fifth Columnists: The Making of McCarthyism and the Second Red Scare," *Canadian Journal of Undergraduate Research* 2, no. 1 (January 2017), 1-4.
[22] Jeakins, "Ominous Communist," 4-8.

rhetoric to their advantage. The southern red scare is the result of southern white supremacy, late-stage McCarthyism, regionalism, and conservatism. What made it particularly potent was the use of state and local power to suppress subversives. This approach was inspired by the work of the House Un-American Activities Committee and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Their efforts curtailed the movement in many ways but failed to topple it.

Katagiri wrote about the same topic in *Black Freedom, White Resistance, and Red Menace: Civil Rights and Anticommunism in the Jim Crow South*. This book is a detailed account of how white segregationists across the south used anticommunist hysteria to attack the civil rights movement. Working at the state and national level with northern anticommunists, white southern segregationists promoted their conspiracy theory. They then used it to justify weaponizing state power against activists.[23] The movement slowly lost steam as the civil rights movement made substantial gains in the 1960s.[24]

Woods and Katagiri show different angles of the southern red scare movement. Katagiri's is a top-down history, focusing on the major politicians, organizations and anti-Communist "experts" who sought to punish subversives. Katagiri talks about specific people they targeted. In contrast, Woods focuses on the ideas of the red-baiters and their influence over the course of the movement. Both authors talk about how the southern red scare helped create a culture of fear and intimidation that limited how civil rights activists could carry on. Their investigations undoubtedly ruined many lives and

[23] Yasuhiro Katagiri, *Black Freedom, White Resistance, and Red Menace: Civil Rights and Anticommunism in the Jim Crow South*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014), 9-15.
[24] Katagiri, *Black Freedom*, 239.

reputations.[25] Despite its weaknesses, it was an effective tool against activists and great for rallying support for segregation. Because these accusations were coming from people who had near total control and resources over major institutions, there was little activists could do to shield or defend themselves.

There was a relationship between the civil rights and communist movements, but it was not clear cut. Manfred Berg explores this relationship in "Black Civil Rights and Liberal Anticommunism: The NAACP in the Early Cold War." In the years preceding the civil rights movement, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Communist Party of the United States of America had competing visions for advancing social justice. The NAACP won out because the Cold War and subsequent red scares weakened the American communist movement. However, they still faced allegations of being tied to Communists.[26] Because of their prominence, the NAACP became a significant target for such attacks. In response, they publicly disavowed communism and cut all ties with communists, real and alleged. This raised a debate over whether disavowing communism and those who supported it would strengthen or weaken the movement.[27]

Berg argues that disavowing communism was the best choice the NAACP could have made. Some argue that the NAACP was part of a liberal anti-Communist purge, and that it cost the movement important allies. They also lost focus of class and economic

[25] Woods, *Black Struggle,* 166-168.
[26] Manfred Berg, "Black Civil Rights and Liberal Anticommunism: The NAACP in the Early Cold War," *Journal of American History* 94, no. 1 (June 1, 2007), 75, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25094777.
[27] Berg, "Liberal Anticommunism," 76.

issues, stunting the movement's potential. Berg argues that the potential for an alliance between communists and civil rights activists was overblown. The NAACP and CPUSA often clashed over their different views of the nature of and solution to the freedom struggle.[28] Despite the many accusations, there is no evidence that the NAACP's disavowals amounted to a purge.[29] Like Woods, Berg argued that sacrificing communists, real and alleged, was best given the power of massive resistance and the larger anti-communist sentiment. It would've distracted from the movement's focus on political issues and public accommodations.[30] America in the early Cold War was not in the position to have a national conversation about economic problems while fighting the Soviet Union. Activist circles were not the only space vulnerable to segregationists' attacks.

Joy Ann Williamson-Lott created several works about the history of southern colleges and universities during the civil rights movement. In particular, she covers how institutions of higher learning struggled with state repression of civil rights protests. In "The Battle over Power, Control, and Academic Freedom at Southern Institutions of Higher Education," Williamson-Lott details how higher education responded to becoming a flashpoint in the southern red scare. Many white southern segregationists did not trust colleges because they feared that college students were being brainwashed into supporting liberal and communist causes. Federal and state anti-communist commissions in the 1940s and 1950s exposed some white leftist professors, but its bigger impact was

[28] Berg, "Liberal Anticommunism," 76-81.
[29] Berg, "Liberal Anticommunism," 81.
[30] Woods, Black Struggle, 168.

scaring academics into silence.[31] Faculty and administrators were targets because of their place of authority. As a result, many of them chose to be accommodationists, in part, because of their duty to preserve their universities. At the same time, those who spoke out wanted to use their authority for greater good. Williamson-Lott's research focuses a lot on this balance between a desire for self-preservation and a desire for justice.

In "'This Has Been Quite a Year for Heads Falling': Institutional Autonomy in the Civil Rights Era," Williamson-Lott explores the Dr. Biettel controversy. Beittel's support for the movement at Tougaloo College drew the ire of Mississippi's segregationist movement.[32] State officials launched a campaign to retaliate against the school unless Beittel was removed as president.[33] Their attacks amounted to nothing, but it was enough for the board of trustees to push Beittel to resign in 1964. The precise cause of Beittel's firing - the sovereignty commission's pressure, the school's financial issues, or something else - became a source of controversy.[34] Regardless of why Beittel was fired, this episode stands as an example of the kinds of pressures institutions faced during the civil rights era.[35] In this case, Tougaloo's trustees chose self-preservation.

Radicalizing the Ebony Tower: Black Colleges and the Black Freedom Struggle in Mississippi explores the history of Mississippi colleges and universities during the civil rights movement, with a focus on historically black institutions. How an institution was

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[31] Joy Ann Williamson-Lott, "The Battle over Power, Control, and Academic Freedom at Southern Institutions of Higher Education," *The Journal of Southern History* 79, 4, (November 2013), 883, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23799247.
[32] Williamson, "Heads Falling," 562-564.
[33] Williamson, "Heads Falling," 562-565.
[34] Williamson, "Heads Falling," 570-573.
[35] Williamson, "Heads Falling," 575.

founded and established usually indicated how they handled race and protests.[36] Tougaloo was established by racially liberal northern missionaries, with most of its funding from sources out of state. However, they were vulnerable to backlash from local white supremacists and the state government.[37] The school's administration worked to accommodate outside forces, which was difficult given the rise of student activism.[38] The administration had to weigh internal and external conservative backlash, pressure from the state government, and financial issues.[39] The final straw was the Ford Foundation Fund for the Advancement of Education, a sponsored partnership between HBCUs and northern predominantly white institutions. Tougaloo applied for the grant, hoping to be matched with Brown University. Both Tougaloo's board of trustees and Brown's president Dr. Barnaby Keeney feared that the local controversy would jeopardize Tougaloo's chances of getting the Ford grant. To prevent this, Beittel was fired in January 1964. Dr. Biettel went back and forth with the board of trustees over why he was fired. At the same time, state legislators introduced a bill to revoke Tougaloo's charter. The bill died in a matter of months. In April that same year. Erle Johnston of the sovereignty commission met with several members of the board to pressure them into firing Biettel, who was already fired. Regardless of the exact reason, Biettel's firing was final before the MSSC got directly involved.[40]

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[36] Joy Ann Williamson, *Radicalizing the Ebony Tower: Black Colleges and the Black Freedom Struggle in Mississippi*, (New York: Teachers College Press, 2008), 15.
[37] Williamson, "Ebony Tower," 16 -88.
[38] Williamson, "Ebony Tower," 97.
[39] Williamson, "Ebony Tower," 87-102.
[40] Williamson, "Ebony Tower," 101-105.

Williamson-Lott's works raise an important point: there was no one factor that overtook all the others in Dr. Biettel's firing. Her book *Radicalizing the Ebony Tower* argues that the external pressure from segregationists and Brown led to Beittel's firing. Her argument takes all factors into account equally, as they were all intertwined. In particular, she focuses more on internal dissent in Tougaloo's administration versus the atmosphere of terror sewed by segregationists. Given how much the two worked together, one could argue that the latter exacerbated the former.

Maria R. Lowe explored Tougaloo's internal conflicts in more depth in "An 'Oasis of Freedom' in a 'Closed Society': The Development of Tougaloo College as a Free Space in Mississippi's Civil Rights Movement, 1960-1964." Lowe analyzes the Tougaloo movement from a sociological and historical perspective. Throughout Tougaloo's history, the school has had a tradition of racial liberalism. As the civil rights movement took off in the twentieth century, faculty and students were inspired to join the movement. Professors created spaces around campus and in classrooms for students' intellectual growth outside of Mississippi's traditional beliefs. Activists, students, and more flocked to the school to organize, strategize, and share ideas. When Dr. A.D. Biettel began openly supporting this, it drew the attention of state authorities. This led to Beittel losing his job.[41]

Lowe's approach reveals why Dr. Biettel was singled out. Beittel had little involvement in organizing protests and rallying activists and students. But his position of authority gave him greater visibility and responsibility in their eyes. Williamson-Lott

[41] Lowe, "An Oasis," 496-510.

spoke about how environmental forces shaped the decisions of all of Tougaloo's leaders, but Lowe focused more on the consequences of those choices.

Mississippi, the View from Tougaloo tells the history of Tougaloo College, written by activist and professor Clarice T. Campbell. I focused solely on the chapters pertaining to Tougaloo's history during the Civil Rights Movement. The campus became a center of student-led civil rights activism in the 1960s.[42] University President Reverend Dr. A.D. Beittel's support of the activism drew the anger of local white citizens and state authorities.[43] Political violence and aggression were commonplace.[44] In 1963, state officials sought to shut down the school's activist spirit, which led to Beittel's resignation in 1964.[45]

Many factors converged to make Tougaloo what it was: liberal founders, a liberal arts education, a historically black institution, founded in the heart of Jim Crow. Being based in Mississippi aided in Tougaloo's rise, as the closed society provided the oppressive, white supremacist environment that Tougaloo's activists wanted to liberate themselves and others from. This look inside Tougaloo also reveals the major flaw in Tougaloo's oasis, something Lowe and Williamson-Lott also touched on. Though the college was unique for its setting, its leadership was still beholden to the forces of its environment. Ultimately, it would capitulate to them.

Clyde Kennard was one of these local people who became the southern red scare's main targets. This paper refers to two sources for his story. The first is Timothy J.

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[42] Clarice T. Campbell and Oscar A. Rogers, *Mississippi, the View from Tougaloo*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1979), 201.
[43] Campbell and Rogers, "Tougaloo," 196-198.
[44] Campbell and Rogers, "Tougaloo," 212-213.
[45] Campbell and Rogers, "Tougaloo," 214-217.

Minchin's and John A. Salmond's "'The Saddest Story of the Whole Movement': The Clyde Kennard Case and the Search for Racial Reconciliation in Mississippi, 1955-2007." The second is Devery S. Anderson's *A Slow, Calculated Lynching: The Story of Clyde Kennard*. Kennard tried to integrate Mississippi Southern College, then an all-white institution, between 1955 and 1959. He wanted to transfer to continue his education at MSC because it was the closest, and he was openly against segregation. In response, the sovereignty commission and the university's president worked together to discredit and dissuade him.[46] He was falsely convicted of stealing chicken feed in 1960 and was sentenced to prison time at Parchman. He fell severely ill while there, and his illness was exacerbated by the governor denying him release and the warden denying him treatment. Governor Coleman finally released Kennard in 1963. His illness was terminal by then, and he died months later. Since then, a legal campaign in 2006 led to Kennard's exoneration and MSC acknowledging his legacy.[47]

Kennard's story is another example of how vulnerable activists were to attacks. He and those at Tougaloo College lacked the same level of organization and resources as those at the sovereignty commission. As such, it was much more difficult for them to appropriately defend themselves from smear campaigns and economic and political attacks. The approaches they did take were slightly different. In Kennard's case, he chose to push forward regardless of the risks.[48] In Dr. Biettel's case, the board of trustees forced him out to preserve the school and its finances. The choices they made were largely

[46] Devery S. Anderson, *A Slow, Calculated Lynching: The Story of Clyde Kennard*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2023) 15-60.
[47] Minchin & Salmond, "Saddest Story," 207-230.
[48] Minchin & Salmond, "'The Saddest Story,'" 197-210.

dependent on their characters and circumstances, but both ultimately failed to escape persecution for their support of the movement.

The Southern Way of Life

Since the antebellum era, southern white supremacists have had a strong fear of outsiders disrupting the social order. Specifically, they feared that these faceless, nameless "outside agitators" and subversives could destroy the south from within by hitting it in its most sensitive point: race relations. According to white supremacist beliefs, black people were inherently less intelligent and lacked the natural love of patriotism and democracy that white people had. This was part of what made them more susceptible to manipulation. This paranoia fed into fears of a violent racial rebellion led by angry, vengeful black people against their masters.[49]

In the years after the Civil War, Black Americans gained access to basic civil rights and citizenship through the Reconstruction amendments. They also made significant gains towards increasing their economic independence. However, this era of hope and progress was short-lived. White supremacist southerners set out to "redeem" the south from the embarrassment and devastation of the civil war. Through democratic and anti-democratic means, the Redeemers successfully ended national Reconstruction. As part of their victory, they began reversing much of the progress of the previous years. A key element of this was disenfranchising black voters. Mississippi's 1890 state constitution, which indirectly barred Black Americans from voting, became a blueprint

[49] Woods, *Black Struggle*, 14-16.

for the rest of the south. The state constitution did not explicitly ban people of color from voting, but it did create several barriers that specifically targeted freedmen and their descendants.[50] The consequences of this unfinished revolution would reverberate out for generations to come.

The end of Reconstruction in the late 1870s led to the rise of the apartheid system known as Jim Crow. Jim Crow was a system of racial segregation and subjugation. Law and social custom required racial segregation in public spaces such as schools, parks, and more. Racial subjugation came in the form of disenfranchisement, underfunded schools, the persistent threat of racist violence, and more. Perhaps no place was as passionately aligned with Jim Crow as Mississippi.[51]

In a region partly defined by its history of white supremacy, many saw Mississippi in a league of its own.[52] Naturally, this extended into its punishment of detractors. Racial terror lynchings led by white citizens were a regular nightmare. Most of the time, however, the system used democratic means to enforce its rule. White supremacists controlled every major institution in the state and crafted the law and bureaucracy to uphold the racial status quo. White supremacist Mississippians may have thought that their society was "separate but equal," but the evidence shows that white Mississippians society dominated politically and economically.[53] Black Americans had few resources to defend themselves. This level of power, paranoia, and motivation was perfect fuel for a state-sponsored moral panic.

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[50] Dittmer, *Local People*, 12-13.
[51] Dittmer, *Local People*, 9.
[52] Katagiri, *Black Freedom*, 170-172.
[53] Dittmer, *Local People*, 12-15.

The relationship between the communist and racial justice movements wasn't very close. However, the communist labor movement did try to make inroads in Mississippi in the 1930s. After the Great Depression, several interracial unions for sharecroppers and poor farmers sprang up across the south. These groups had links to the larger communist and socialist movements, who sought out southern and black members.[54] The Communist Party of the United States of America took up racial justice issues throughout the interwar years in the hopes of appealing to black people.[55] However, most Black Americans were wary of communism. Many thought that their ideas were too radical and didn't focus enough on race. They also feared the consequences of associating with groups like the CPUSA. It became even more taboo during World War II, when many began to see communists as America's enemies.[56]

World War II set the stage for a new wave of activism - for and against racial justice. During the war, Black Americans launched the Double V for Victory campaign, connecting their domestic struggles against racism and white supremacy with the international struggle against the Axis powers.[57] Black Americans played important roles in the military and wartime industries, as well. Over 85,000 black Mississippians served in the second world war. Serving the military did not spare them from prejudice, discrimination, or racist violence. However, it did mark a turning point in American race relations that would reach up to the federal level.[58]

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[54] Katagiri, *Black Freedom*, 2-5.
[55] Berg, "Liberal Anticommunism," 79.
[56] Berg, "Liberal Anticommunism," 18-24.
[57] Woods, *Black Struggle*, 23.
[58] Dittmer, *Local People*, 13-19.

In response to rising pressure, the federal government began taking up civil rights issues in the late 1940s. In 1946, President Harry Truman's administration established the President's Committee on Civil Rights. The committee released a report, "To Secure These Rights," with a thirty-five-point plan for protecting the civil rights of Black Americans. At the 1948 Democratic National Convention, the national Democrats added a civil rights plank to their platform. A major motivation for this shift was the need to improve the country's international image during the Cold War. The nation's leaders knew the United States' efforts to brand itself as a beacon of democracy and freedom looked hypocritical in the face of rampant anti-black racial oppression and segregation in the south.[59]

The southern political establishment swiftly came out against the national Democrats' progressive turn. In 1938, Congress established the Dies Committee, after its chair Democratic Representation Martin Dies, Jr. Their goal was to root out alleged subversives. Later renamed the House Un-American Activities Committee, it would enforce an era of anti-communist paranoia throughout the country. It would also serve as a model for southern states.[60] A decade later, after the 1948 Democratic National Convention, white southern Democrats established the Dixiecrat Party. With a hard right, anti-civil rights plank, the party stood firm in their commitment to protecting America from what it saw as harmful, subversive plots.[61]

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[59]Mary L. Dudziak, "Brown as a Cold War Case," *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 1 (June 2004): 34. JSTOR.
[60] Katagiri, *Black Freedom*, 4-6.
[61] Katagiri, *Black Freedom*, 8-9.

Most of the political force behind these efforts was driven by the wealthy and politically powerful. Their presence gave the movement legitimacy, and they often employed legal and moral arguments about government power and culture to defend segregation. Segregationist leaders did not just fear federal overreach and the loss of "southern culture." They feared that Black Americans' civil, political, and economic advancement would threaten their power and influence. They feared upsetting the hierarchy of power and would go to great lengths to preserve it.[62]

The Red and White Menace

While the civil rights movement was about to boil over, Senator Joseph McCarthy reached the height of his powers. He rose to national prominence as the red-baiting demagogue at the forefront of HUAC's war on communist subversives. His attacks, accusations, and general pot-stirring fanned the flames of anti-communist hysteria. By the time massive resistance started heating up, McCarthy's career was cooling down. In 1954, Congress censured him, and his popularity declined sharply and never recovered. McCarthy was never a popular figure in the south, and the second red scare didn't captivate the region like it did the rest of the nation. However, McCarthy's firebrand was a major inspiration for white southern segregationists.[63] The same year McCarthy's flame sputtered out; the Supreme Court released a decision that would set Mississippi ablaze.

In May 1954, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously in *Brown v Board of Education* that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. It was a shot.

[62] Brown*, Elite Leadership*, 827-830.
[63] Katagiri, *Black Freedom*, 10-11.

Seeing their worst fears come true, the white supremacist south sprang into action.[64] In 1956, segregationist congressmen from across the south created "the Southern Manifesto" declaring their opposition to the ruling on moral and constitutional grounds. "In this trying period, as we all seek to right this wrong, we appeal to our people not to be provoked by the agitators and troublemakers invading our States and to scrupulously refrain from disorder and lawless acts" it read.[65] This line declared their intentions to preserve segregation using legal, nonviolent means. This contrasts them with both the violent segregationists and civil rights "troublemakers." In addition to being a declaration of war, it is a harbinger of the backlash activists would face.

Civil rights activists also took the supreme court's ruling as a call to action. In Mississippi, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People led the charge to take advantage of the new moment. They supported a series of cases that challenged local laws to ensure that integration was implemented smoothly. But as far as southern white supremacists were concerned, segregation would not go down without a fight.

Opposition to the movement mounted in Mississippi. The same year as the *Brown* ruling, the Citizens' Council was founded in Indianola, Mississippi. Dedicated to preserving white supremacy in the south, the Citizen's Council waged economic terror against civil rights activists.[66] In 1956, the state legislature established the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, a state agency whose primary purpose was to seek and

[64] Dittmer, *Local People*, 30-41.
[65] H.R. Rep no. 102-4, at 1 (1956).
[66] Dittmer, *Local People*, 43-46.

destroy civil rights activity in the state.[67] In the federal government, segregationist politicians used HUAC and other tools to influence the national conversation about race and spread their climate of paranoia.[68] With these combined efforts, white southern segregationists successfully spread the narrative that the foreign war against communism was linked to the domestic racial uprising in the south.

A pamphlet from the Citizens' Council by history professor Dr. Medford Evans outlines the southern red scare's ideology. He wrote, "...the race question as it exists today, and the Communist question cannot in any way be separated-for the agitation of the race question is what the Communists are doing to this country."[69] Southern white supremacists argued that the Brown decision was the result of communist aligned groups infiltrating the federal government. The goal of these groups, supposedly, was to take advantage of Black southerners to sow racial discord and destroy American society from within. In their eyes, the entire campaign for integration was inherently communistic, and racial segregation was a social and moral good. Framing racial justice and communism as one in the same also strengthened segregationists' arguments. Not only could they say they were fighting for the good of the south, but for the whole nation. The southern segregationists, though strong regionalists, could still understand that their movement required broader support. To get that support, they needed to tie their cause to the fate of the nation.

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[67] Katagiri, *Sovereignty Commission*, 5-6.
[68] Katagiri, *Black Freedom*, 13.
[69] Medford Evans, *Forced Integration Is Communism in Action*. Mississippiana Collection. Digital Collections. https://usm.access.preservica.com/uncategorized/IO_f3ac1b72-9c9e-4e18-9c8d-38ee1a647aed. 1962.

It was easy for many Mississippians, who were mostly raised on white supremacist and southern nationalist narratives of history and culture, to interpret the civil rights activists as "outside agitators." These agitators were an existential threat, so they reasoned the best way to combat them was with a heavy approach. While Mississippi had a long history of racist violence, the southern red scare would rely on tactics that were non-violent but no less devastating.

The Southern Way of Life

Colleges and universities were singled out during the southern red scare. As such, they play an important role in creating and maintaining the status quo. In Mississippi, education was notoriously separate and unequal. Generally, all-black schools would receive much less funding and lower quality resources than the all-white schools.[70] It was the same in higher education. Mississippi's network of in-state colleges was all segregated, and the historically black colleges and universities typically receiving less funding.[71]

During the Reconstruction era, states, religious organizations, and other organizations started to establish all-black colleges and universities initially to train teachers. These teachers would educate the masses of formerly enslaved people. A divide grew between those with differing opinions on how freedmen should be educated. One side believed that education should nurture black intellectual capabilities and breed the next generation of black leadership. Others believed that freedmen should focus on

[70] Dittmer, *Local People*, 34-35.
[71] Williamson-Lott, *Ebony Tower*, 23-24.

learning vocational skills and gradually assimilate into society. A southern college's approach to race usually depended on two main factors: whether it was public or private, and whether it was historically black or historically white. In the late nineteenth century, many white denominational bodies from the north began establishing schools in the south to educate freedmen. One of these schools would become the center of a local controversy that would threaten its existence almost one hundred years after its founding.[72]

[72] Williamson-Lott, *Ebony Tower*, 14-16.

THE STUDENT

"Yet, What Other Course Can I Take?"

Clyde Kennard was born to a farming family in Hattiesburg, Mississippi in 1927. He moved between Hattiesburg and Chicago throughout his life, especially after he joined the military. Kennard first joined the army in 1945, right after World War II. While serving in Germany, he taught denazification classes to German children. Kennard was discharged in 1949. In 1950, he reenlisted to serve in the Korean War. That same year, he got his GED and began attending Fayetteville State Teachers College while stationed in North Carolina. He was honorably discharged in 1952. His time in the military and completing his education were important steps for hime to become politically conscious.[73]

Kennard bought a farm for his parents in Mississippi and enrolled at the University of Chicago in 1950.[74] He struggled to pass his exams, but never got the chance to retake them because he had to return to Mississippi. His stepfather died in 1955, forcing him to help at his family's farm. He also became a leader in the community, joining the Forrest County Board of Education as a trustee and organizing events for the Mary Magdalene Baptist Church.[75] Though he'd become a community leader, the idea of finishing school never left Kennard's mind.[76]

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[73] Anderson, *Clyde Kennard*, 11-14.
[74] Dittmer, *Local People*, 79.
[75] Anderson, *Clyde Kennard*, 16-23.
[76] Anderson, *Clyde Kennard,* 16.

Kennard made several attempts to apply to MSC. The first one was in 1955. He called the school and asked for a catalog, which he received. When he called again to ask for an application, he mentioned he was Black. When the application never came, Kennard went up to the school to meet with university president Dr. William D. McCain.[77] To transfer to MSC, applicants had to submit a completed application, a medical examination, a transcript from their previous school, and five recommendations from alumni that lived in the same county as the applicant.[78] Kennard explained that he could not find fulfill the alumni requirement and asked if he could submit recommendations from his previous instructors instead. McCain explained that this change would have to be approved by the Institutions of Higher Learning board. Kennard's application was rejected.[79] McCain later admitted to the sovereignty commission that he found nothing wrong with his initial application.[80] Though even if he had met all the requirements, he never would've been allowed to enroll due to his race. Undeterred, Kennard applied again in 1958. This attempt generated the biggest controversy.[81]

Kennard's second attempt at applying to MSC put him in the sights of the sovereignty commission. He called MSC's admissions director Aubrey Lucas and asked for a new application for himself and four more for some prospective students. Lucas informed him that each student would have to get their own application and sent Kennard

[77] Anderson, *Clyde Kennard*, 24.
[78] SCR ID # 1-27-0-6-8-1-1.
[79] Anderson, *Clyde Kennard*, 24-25.
[80] Minchin & Salmond, "'The Saddest Story," 200-201.
[81] Minchin & Salmond, "'The Saddest Story," 202.

one. Lucas then alerted McCain, who in turn consulted Governor James P. Coleman about the situation. Coleman directed the sovereignty commission to investigate and shut down Kennard's plans. They wanted to wrap the story up quickly and quietly to prevent a large controversy.

Kennard's exact reasons for choosing Mississippi Southern College were somewhat ambiguous. He stated he wanted to complete his degree at MSC because it was the closest to his home. MSC was a whites-only college, and there were no Black colleges in the area at the time.[82] The closest black schools to Kennard were Jackson State College and Tougaloo College. Both were about ninety miles away in Jackson.[83] At the same time, he'd become more politically involved in the three years between his first and second attempts. He joined the Forrest County NAACP chapter in 1958. He became president of Hattiesburg's NAACP Youth Council, where he mentored future activists and Tougaloo students Joyce and Dorie Ladner.[84] In a 1958 letter to the editor in the *Hattiesburg American*, Kennard wrote, "As the public schools are the essential organs for general intellectual discipline, and the preparation for private life and public life service, let us superimpose the plan of separate but equal on the public school system."[85] Kennard's words hit an incredibly sensitive spot. The years of post-Brown backlash were defined by a rally of segregationist action and sentiment. For a Black man to use a local newspaper to proudly support integration was incredibly dangerous. Despite their

[82] Minchin and John A. Salmond, "Saddest Story," 197.
[83] Anderson, *Clyde Kennard*, 16.
[84] Anderson, *Clyde Kennard,* 28-29.
[85] SCR ID # 1-27-0-5-1-1-1.

searching, they found very little that could compromise his image.[86] Many people in the Hattiesburg's black community described Kennard as an upstanding man and role model.[87] This may have been why their tactics came to focus more on convincing Kennard to back down, but this would not work either.[88]

Kennard thought he could reason with MSC's administrators. He had multiple meetings and conversations with McCain, and his 1959 application includes an essay in defense of integration in schools. "I know that there are those among us who feel that both races would be best benefited by a policy of private and public segregation of the races, and that segregation should be maintained no matter what the cost to ourselves and our future generations," he wrote, likely crafting his argument to be more digestible. "Unfortunately, perhaps, I have not yet been able to convince myself, nor has anyone else been able to convince me that this is really the wisest course for Mississippi to continue to follow at this critical junction in our state's history."[89] This statement shows that Kennard's decision to apply to MSC was a deliberate protest. Like many activists, Kennard had much to lose. And like many activists, his response to mounting pressure from segregationists was to continue.

The sovereignty commission made several efforts to discredit, defame, and dissuade Kennard as soon as they learned about his case. Investigator Zack Van Landingham and other agents dug up every piece of information about him they could

[86] Minchin & Salmond, "'The Saddest Story," 201-205.
[87] Dittmer, *Local People*, 80.
[88] Dittmer, *Local People*, 80-81.
[89] SCR ID# 1-27-0-29-2-1-1.

find.[90] The commission's investigation was extensive, tracing Kennard's social circle in Hattiesburg and digging up records about his finances and his previous schools.[91] They found evidence of Kennard's integrationist beliefs and connections to the NAACP.[92] They also reached out to several people in Hattiesburg's black community and asked them to convince Kennard to back down. This included a group of Black educators and community leaders as well as several of Kennard's friends and acquaintances. None of them could steer him off course.[93]

The southern red scare influenced McCain's reactions to Kennard. McCain was a staunch segregationist and believer in the southern red scare theory. McCain also had a personal collection of southern red scare pamphlets and propaganda. One of them argued that Soviet Communists had infiltrated left-wing groups like the NAACP and were using them to facilitate a communist takeover under the guise of creating racial equality. "The enemies of America, and of the South, thrive on ignorance. That why they conspire in secret, why they hide their real motives…why they pretend to be friends of the Negroes and the workers, both of whom they hope to enslave, for their own selfish and subversive purposes."[94] While there are no records of McCain explicitly calling Kennard a communist, his ownership of this pamphlet shows that his views on race were shaped by the southern red scare conspiracy theory. He admitted to the commission that he did not believe Kennard was "sent" by the NAACP.[95] This may be because of the numerous

[90] Minchin & Salmond, "'The Saddest Story,'" 201-205.
[91] Anderson, *Clyde Kennard*, 32-46.
[92] Minchin & Salmond, "'The Saddest Story," 207.
[93] Dittmer, *Local People*, 81.
[94] Kemp, "Behind the plot," 5.
[95] SCR ID # 1-27-0-6-10-1-1.

conversations they had about the issue. McCain could have believed that Kennard's campaign was not the result of a coordinated effort, but a misguided attempt at justice. He could've seen Kennard as one of the many Black people misguided by the NAACP's subversive, anti-American lies. Hence, most of the sovereignty commission's efforts were about talking Kennard down rather than straight forwardly threatening or punishing him. Either strategy was futile.

Kennard was also familiar with the accusation that integrationists were Communists. He addressed these allegations in the *Hattiesburg American* in 1960, writing, "The differences which we now have over this matter of segregation versus integration have, unfortunately, been characterized by some as a mortal contest between out-side agitators and-or Communists, and peaceful, law-abiding citizens. This is furthest from the truth."[96] He, like other activists, saw right through the segregationists' red baiting talking points. However, he could do little to address them. He was already a target and lacked access to the intelligence and legal resources the commission and its allies had. Throughout the adversity, he continued to stand his ground and denied attempts to smear him. This was costly, as he was still vulnerable to all sorts of attacks. The sovereignty commission may never have allowed him to enroll at MSC, and Kennard had far more to lose than them.

In December, Kennard met with McCain and Gov. Coleman for two hours to discuss his application. Gov. Coleman told Kennard to rescind his application, at least until after the upcoming state primary elections. Gov. Coleman warned that forcing the

[96] SCR ID # 1-27-0-58-1-1-1.

issue would force the state to close MSC and lead to a legal battle that might hurt Kennard's community. Kennard relented.[97] It is not known precisely why Kennard decided to back down at this moment, but the reaction from segregationists was one of relief. The Mount Olive Tribune wrote, "It is too bad that other members of the Negro race were not given the same advice. However, this would not have met with the approval of the NAACP."[98] The author referred to the strongly held belief that the NAACP was one of several key communist organizations brainwashing Black Mississippians. This is the same belief McCain held. The complete disregard for Kennard's autonomy highlights a key element of the southern red scare conspiracy. Many of its white believers did not comprehend that Black people were full, complex human beings. Hence, Kennard's earlier attempts to make logical and ethical appeals to segregationists were bound to fail. They had already focused their efforts on blocking him out because of his race, but his continued defiance made him a threat that needed to be extinguished. The sentiment was that any type of defiance was an anomaly that needed to be tamed, lest it disrupt the peace.

Black and Gold

Kennard's downfall came after he submitted his final application. He informed McCain he was reapplying after the primary season ended in September 1959.[99] This time, McCain, the commission, and the governor formed a plan with stronger

[97] Anderson, *Clyde Kennard,* 50-51.
[98] SCR ID # 1-27-0-24-1-1-1.
[99] Anderson, *Clyde Kennard,* 51.

consequences. The day before he submitted it, McCain tried again in vain to get him to back down. McCain delayed sending Kennard an application in hopes he would miss the application deadline. The IHL board passed a resolution that MSC only accepted transfer students who had all A's from their previous schools. This would exclude Kennard, who had yet to retake the exams he failed at the University of Chicago.[100] Kennard's car insurance company stopped covering him, and his chicken farm went into foreclosure.[101] Van Landingham, Gov. Coleman, and McCain pored over Kennard's application, looking for information that might disqualify him. They discovered that Kennard reused a medical exam form from his previous application. They confirmed this with Kennard's doctor.

On September 15, 1959, Kennard went to MSC and had a final meeting with McCain.[102] McCain reiterated that this would end poorly for both Black and white Mississippians. Kennard was not swayed this time. He even stated that he would sue the school with help from the NAACP if it came to that.[103] When confronted with the inconsistencies, he denied committing fraud and reiterated his commitment to attending MSC. That same day, two white constables who'd been waiting by his car arrested Kennard for speeding and possessing hard liquor, the latter of which was illegal in Mississippi at the time. They acted independent of the sovereignty commission's plans.[104]

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[100] Anderson*, Clyde Kennard,* 51-52.
[101] Minchin & Salmond, "'The Saddest Story," 206.
[102] Minchin & Salmond, "'The Saddest Story," 205-207.
[103] Anderson*, Clyde Kennard,* 53-54.
[104] Anderson, *Clyde Kennard*, 54-61.

However, McCain and Van Landingham learned after Kennard's arrest that he'd been framed and had chosen to keep quiet about it.[105]

It was the beginning of Kennard's legal troubles. Kennard's friends in the NAACP immediately began working to free him, especially state field secretary Medgar Evers.[106] The judge found Kennard guilty on both charges. He lost his appeal. Weeks later, he was arrested again as a co-conspirator in a robbery. An employee at Forrest County Cooperative, which owned his family's farm, stole $25 worth chicken feed. In court, the thief was pressured to testify that Kennard was his accomplice. The judge convicted Kennard of accessory to burglary and gave him the maximum sentence of seven years. The charge was a felony, making Kennard ineligible to apply to any white college in the state.[107]

Kennard was sent to Parchman Penitentiary, where he was forced to work on the cotton plantation.[108] Years earlier, he began treatment for weakness, nausea, and weight loss.[109] His anemia got worse in prison, and he was diagnosed with colon cancer. He was moved to the University of Mississippi Medical Center for surgery. Doctors gave him five years to live.[110] They recommended he be given parole due to his condition. The prison ignored the doctor's recommendations and continued forcing Kennard to work through his illness. When Kennard's allies on the outside learned about his plight, they worked to get his story more publicity. His story became national news, with activists and

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[105] Anderson, *Clyde Kennard*, 67.
[106] Anderson, *Clyde Kennard.* 65-66.
[107] Minchin & Salmond, "'The Saddest Story,'" 210-217.
[108] Minchin & Salmond, "'The Saddest Story,'" 217.
[109] Anderson, *Clyde Kennard*, 76.
[110] Anderson, *Clyde Kennard,* 137-141.

civil rights groups putting pressure on the state government to free him. After two months of pressure, Governor Ross Barnett finally suspended Kennard's sentence. But victory was short-lived. Kennard returned to his farm in Hattiesburg as his cancer continued to spread. It took his life on the Fourth of July, 1963.[111]

In the years following Kennard's death, the tides turned in his favor. After the Civil Rights Act of 1964, political leadership in Mississippi began to slowly accept integration. Raylawni Branch and Elaine Armstrong became the first Black students to enroll in MSC in 1965. By that time, MSC had been renamed to the University of Southern Mississippi. Over the years, Black Mississippians built up more social and political power, allowing for greater momentum in defense of Kennard's legacy. After a protracted legal battle, the state released all the MSSC's files to the public in 1998.[112] Kennard's story faded into obscurity until journalist Jerry Mitchell published an investigation based on the sovereignty commission's files. Mitchell's work kickstarted a campaign to reopen Kennard's case and pardon him. USM acknowledged Kennard's impact for the first time. After a month-long legal campaign, Judge Robert Helfrich reversed Kennard's conviction for burglary on May 16, 2006.[113]

[111] Minchin & Salmond, "'The Saddest Story,'" 217-219.
[112] Minchin & Salmond, "'The Saddest Story,'" 222-225.
[113] Minchin & Salmond, "'The Saddest Story,'" 220-230.

THE SCHOOL

The Oasis

In 1859, the American Missionary Association bought a 500-acre piece of land with help from the Freedmen's Bureau. Their intention was to start a school for freedmen. That school became Tougaloo University. Tougaloo gained its charter from the Mississippi legislature in 1871.[114] Over time, it became a school for children from elementary up to university.[115] In the twentieth century, Tougaloo University was renamed to Tougaloo College and became a four-year undergraduate program. In addition, the school revamped its faculty and curriculum. In 1948, Tougaloo was the only accredited black college in the state of Mississippi.[116]

From early on, Tougaloo's internal culture was set apart from the world it inhabited. Tougaloo's founding organizations, the American Missionary Association, the Freedmen's Bureau, and the United Church of Christ, were racially liberal and took the progressive approach to black education.[117] Tougaloo's charter explicitly outlined its purpose was to provide black pupils a quality education.[118] The school was also also a member of the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, the only black college in the Mississippi with that distinction.[119] Starting in the twentieth century, more black people took positions on the administration and faculty.[120]

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[114] Williamson-Lott, *Ebony Tower,* 16.
[115] Campbell and Rogers, *The View*, 164-165.
[116] Williamson-Lott, *Ebony Tower,* 16-17.
[117] Lowe, "An Oasis," 495.
[118] Lowe, "An Oasis," 496-497.
[119] Campbell and Rogers, *The View,* 181.
[120] Lowe, "An Oasis," 498.

Tougaloo's liberal turn began in the 1940s as post-war political activism slowly increased. Sociology professor Dr. Ernst Borinski founded the school's social science forums, inviting local activists to speak on campus about the movement.[121] In classrooms, professors engaged students during discussions and encouraged counter-cultural thinking.[122] Over time, movement leaders and members became drawn to the school. Tougaloo welcomed the likes of Robert Moses, Fannie Lou Hamer, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Congress of Racial Equality. They used Tougaloo to build their network, strategize, and spread their messages.[123]

Part of the reason Tougaloo could be so liberal was because of how the college existed. As a private institution, most of Tougaloo's funding came from the AMA, which was based in New York City, far from the seat of power in Mississippi. But as an all-black college in one of Jim Crow's strongholds, Tougaloo's trustees, most of whom were white, erred on the side of accommodation.[124] The school's administrators generally had a positive relationship with state legislators, with the expectation that they would keep the school stayed in line.[125]

Student teacher and activist John Salter spoke about Tougaloo's importance to the Mississippi movement: "And, certainly, one of the very basic elements involved in this revolution are the Negro colleges - most especially those colleges that are under private

[121] Lowe, "An Oasis," 498-500.
[122] Lowe, "An Oasis," 499-501.
[123] Lowe, "An Oasis," 505-507.
[124] Williamson-Lott, *Ebony Tower,* 29-89.
[125] Campbell and Rogers, *The View,* 167-168.

auspices that are free from the control of segregation-oriented governments."[126] A major reason activists, students, and others felt so comfortable openly expressing and organizing at Tougaloo was because of its perceived safety. Compared to other colleges and universities in the state, it was more isolated from state control. The community provided a sense of liberation and safety that was rare in other parts of the state.

As Tougaloo made itself a core part of Mississippi's movement, local and national developments raised the stakes. In 1955, the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown II* that integration should take place "with all deliberate speed." Southern segregationists took advantage of this vague language to justify delaying integration indefinitely.[127] That same year, two white men from Money, Mississippi lynched black fourteen-year-old Emmett Till. The case, which ended with an all-white jury acquitting the men, awakened the consciousness of a generation of young black Mississippians.[128] In 1958, Clyde Kennard attempted to integrate MSC in Hattiesburg, costing him his life in more ways than one.[129] In Greensboro, North Carolina, a group of black college students held a sit-in at a local Woolworth lunch counter. A wave of similar sit-in protests followed.[130] In this flurry of action, white segregationist leaders across the south began an all-out defense of the hierarchy.[131] Amid this flurry, Tougaloo's new president stepped into office.

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[126] John Salter, "On the Role of Private Black Colleges in the Southern Freedom Movement," (speech, Harvard Club of New York, NY, September 11, 1963), 2.
[127] Dittmer, *Local People*, 50.
[128] Dittmer, *Local People*, 55-57.
[129] Dittmer, Local People, 79-83.
[130] Dittmer, *Local People*, 85-86.
[131] Brown*, Elite Leadership*, 827-829.

The Desert

While the state could not intervene in Tougaloo's affairs directly, the school was still under the state governments' jurisdiction. Therefore, it was under the sovereignty commission's jurisdiction. In 1964, Mississippi's state government issued a writ of temporary injunction against Dr. Biettel and other faculty, staff, and students at the college to prevent them from protesting. State legislators introduced two bills against Tougaloo. One was to revoke Tougaloo's charter on the grounds that Tougaloo violated it. The focus on activism led to them neglecting their educational responsibilities, and the campus had over $500,000 worth of assets, which exceeded the limit set in their original charter. The other bill sought to rewrite the accreditation standards to revoke Tougaloo's accreditation. The sovereignty commission's all-out attack against Tougaloo had begun.[132]

Internal documents from the sovereignty commission's files show the influence of southern red scare in their campaign against Tougaloo. In early 1964, sovereignty commission director Erle Johnston had several correspondences with Mississippi's Governor Paul B. Johnson, Lieutenant Governor Carrol Gartin, and Chairman of the state Senate Judiciary Committee E.K. Collins on his findings and proposed actions against Tougaloo. Several paragraphs detailed how prominent members of Tougaloo's community, especially Dr. Biettel, had alleged communist sympathies. "He [anti-communist investigator and segregationist ally J.B. Matthews] said that Dr. Biettel and other individuals identified with these groups were 'veteran supporters of communist causes and communist enterprises,'" wrote Johnston. The communist causes and

[132] Williamson-Lott, *Ebony Tower*, 87.

enterprises in question were the Southern Regional Council, the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, and the Southern Conference Educational Fund. Nowhere does Johnston elaborate on what makes these groups communist, or how Dr. Biettel's involvement with them made him a communist.[133] It was simply understood that any association with liberal civil rights groups meant that one was a communist. Dr. Biettel may have been singled out due to his position. As president of the university, he was an important leader and figure. His approval of the protests, whether as a participant or ally, made him a major enabler of subversive acts. That made him and the college a threat to the southern way of life.

Tougaloo's internal struggles aided in the sovereignty commission goals. The truth is that while there was a strong and passionate activist base at Tougaloo, the majority of faculty, staff, and students weren't part of it.[134] Conservatives among Tougaloo's community agreed with the sentiment that activism had taken over the campus.[135] Johnston described how political actions and discussions were taking away from class time, many campus groups had an activist focus, and there was even a work study program for members of SNCC and COFO.[136] Tougaloo was also financially strapped and had been for years.[137] Dr. Biettel and the school's administration were

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[133] Erle Johnston, Jr. *Memo, Erle Johnston, Jr., to Paul B. Johnson, Carroll Gartin, and E.K. Collins; 10 March 1964*. M191 Johnson (Paul B.) Family Papers, Digital Collections, https://usm.access.preservica.com/uncategorized/IO_465ad19e-0c8c-4fa6-86d5-910b754186d7. March 10, 1964, 1.
[134] Dittmer, *Local People*, 226.
[135] Williamson-Lott, *Ebony Tower*, 87.
[136] Erle Johnston, Jr. *Memo, Erle Johnston, Jr., to Paul B. Johnson, Carroll Gartin, and E.K. Collins; 10 March 1964*. M191 Johnson (Paul B.) Family Papers, Digital Collections, https://usm.access.preservica.com/uncategorized/IO_465ad19e-0c8c-4fa6-86d5-910b754186d7. March 10, 1964, 1-2.
[137] Campbell and Rogers, *The View*, 175-182.

working hard to raise more money for the university's facilities. That's when they discovered the Ford Foundation Fund for the Advancement of Education. The Ford Foundation grant would sponsor a partnership between one southern black college and one northern white college. In this case, Tougaloo College chose to partner with Brown University. The schools applied for the grant together in 1963.

Both Tougaloo's administrators feared that the controversy surrounding Biettel would jeopardize Tougaloo's chances of getting the grant.[138] They argued that Beittel's age and lack of engagement with the Ford grant would've made him an ineffective leader during the grant's time. Dr. Biettel's contract stated that he could act as president until he reached 70. When he was told, he would have to resign, he reached out to one of Tougaloo's founders and Brown University president Dr. Barnaby Keeney for answers. He suspected that Brown had influenced the board's decision, which turned out to be correct.[139] Letters between trustees and Brown University president Dr. Barnaby Keeney reveal that Dr. Biettel was targeted from two sides. "Beittel's reaction could have been written in advance by any competent playwright. He has too much of himself invested in Tougaloo to be able to merely step aside when Tougaloo must appear to him to be coming into its own," wrote trustee Merle H. Miller to fellow trustee Wesley Hotchkiss.[140] The trustees and the sovereignty commission blamed Dr. Biettel for the controversy caused by the campus' activist culture. Tougaloo's trustees took the same

[138] Williamson-Lott, *Ebony Tower,* 101.
[139] Dittmer, *Local People*, 235.
[140] Merle H. Miller, *Confidential Letter, Merle H. Miller to Welsey A Hotchkiss, United Church Board of Homeland Ministries, 13 April 1964*, Freedom Now! Brown Digital Repository, https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:1167302/. April 13, 1964, 1.

stance that many civil rights activists took, to cut ties with southern red scare targets rather than defend them. Like them, the trustees moved out of self-preservation. The fact that they capitulated before the commission could reach out to the school directly shows the level of pressure the school was under. They knew well that the activism on campus broke significantly with Mississippi's racial social code and set a target on the entire school. As much as Tougaloo was positioned as an oasis, it was still trapped in a desert and not fully immune to the conditions of their environment.

The board of trustees forced out Dr. Biettel in January 1964 in a special meeting at the AMA's New York headquarters. Dr. Biettel pushed back this decision. He argued that the board violated his contract and that Brown University pushed for him to be replaced. According to his contract, he was supposed to remain Tougaloo's president until he was seventy. He could renew his employment at the age of sixty-five, the same age he was when he got fired.[141] Dr. Biettel believed that the trustees worked with Dr. Barnaby Keeney, president of Brown University, to fire him so that his reputation would not cost them the Ford Foundation grant. Dr. Biettel confronted one trustee with this allegation in a letter. "It was indicated that Brown University would not continue our promising cooperative relationship unless I am replaced, and without Brown University the Ford Foundation will provide no support…and without foundation support the future of Tougaloo College is very uncertain."[142] This controversy highlights a major problem with the "deny and disavow" strategy. While firing Dr. Biettel meant the Tougaloo's

[141] Williamson-Lott, *Ebony Tower,* 102-105.
[142] A.D. Beittel*, Letters, Between A.D. Beittel, President of Tougaloo College and Barnaby C. Keeney, President, Brown University, 5 and 9 April 1964*. Freedom Now! Brown Digital Repository https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:1167302/, April 5 and April 9, 1964, 1.

leadership could be filled by someone less controversial, the local movement could lose out on an important center. Those within the sovereignty commission's line of fire would turn on each other to survive rather than working together. Despite Dr. Biettel's protests, the board's decision was final. Johnston and the sovereignty commission, for all their investigative powers, did not know this until later.[143]

In April 1964, weeks before the board was set to announce Biettel's retirement, Johnston and attorney Shelby Rogers met with these trustees in New York. \The trustees at the meeting were Dr. Wesley Hotchkiss, Robert O. Wilder, Dr. Lawrence L. Durgen, and L. William Nelson. Dr. Hotchkiss was the acting chairman. Unbeknownst to Rogers and Johnston, this meeting would turn out to be redundant. According to a confidential report written by Rogers, he and Johnston were there to inform the trustees of the "dissension and agitation" on their campus because of communist infiltration. Johnston presented the trustees with the commission's evidence for these claims. This started a back-and-forth between the trustees and Johnston and Rogers. While the trustees agreed to look over the commission's evidence, they denied that the activities on campus were rooted in a communist plot or that they required any serious intervention. They, like Dr. Biettel, argued that the students and faculty at Tougaloo had a right to express their opinions freely and engage with a variety of viewpoints. Rogers described the meeting and their intentions as positively as possible, but that did not take the sting out of what they did next. When conversation did not work, Rogers and Johnston turned to veiled threats. "We now 'wondered out loud' as to whether Tougaloo was fulfilling all of its chartered requirements as an educational institution and whether it was fulfilling its

[143] Williamson-Lott, *Ebony Tower,* 102-105.

accreditation requirements at this time," he recalled.[144] Rogers and Johnston came to this meeting with the clear intent to either scare or intimidate the trustees into complying with them. It was part of a long southern tradition of forcing those who stood out back into submission. The trustees bowed to it because they had a lot to lose. The sovereignty commission couldn't convince them of a Communist plot, but they could have shut down the school. Rogers and Johnston were able to reduce their options down to two: protect Dr. Biettel or protect the college. They chose the school. Roger and Johnston ended the meeting by suggesting that they remove Dr. Biettel as president as a first step but made no promises that it would end Tougaloo's problems with the state.[145]

The state's efforts against Tougaloo ultimately failed. The bill to revoke the school's charter died, and the bill to change state accreditation standards passed without any teeth to enforce it. Tougaloo and Dr. Biettel launched a successful media campaign that defended Tougaloo against the state legislature's attacks.[146] The board went on with their plans to pursue the grant without Dr. Biettel. They announced his retirement at their April meeting. A few weeks later, the Brown-Tougaloo partnership became official, and they received the grant.[147] After Dr. Biettel's forced departure, the culture of Tougaloo shifted. Many of the activist professors and students left, and for other reasons the

[144] Shelby R. Rogers, *Confidential report; circa 1964*. M398 Faulkner (Leesha) Civil Rights Collection. Digital Collections. https://usm.access.preservica.com/uncategorized/IO_ccd4151d-5d94-4742-b921-eb01414b9a39. circa 1964, 1-7.
[145] Shelby R. Rogers, *Confidential report; circa 1964*. M398 Faulkner (Leesha) Civil Rights Collection. Digital Collections. https://usm.access.preservica.com/uncategorized/IO_ccd4151d-5d94-4742-b921-eb01414b9a39. circa 1964, 6-7.
[146] Williamson, *Ebony Tower,* 103.
[147] Williamson, "Heads Falling," 567-568.

Tougaloo movement lost steam. Tougaloo's next president, Dr. George Owens, forbade activism on campus.[148]

[148] Williamson, "Heads Falling," 509-510.

CHAPTER IV: BLACK, WHITE, AND RED ALL OVER

There are many similarities between Kennard's and Tougaloo's experiences with the sovereignty commission. Both were stories of civil rights activism in higher education. The sovereignty commission successfully halted the protests that both started or facilitated. Both were seen as agents of a Communist takeover.[149] The main point that differentiates them is their response to the commission's red baiting and political attacks. Their responses, and the community's reactions, show an important weakness in the civil rights movement.

Civil rights activists had no one clear solution for how to respond to such attacks. The most common strategies were to push through or bow to pressure. In pushing through, like Kennard did, they could deny the allegations and continue their protests undisturbed. It was a strategy favored by activists such as Anne Braden, who herself was a target of red baiting. Bowing to such pressures would only weaken their position. Except, their position was already weak due to the scale of their opposition. Kennard himself temporarily bowed to pressure after his second attempt in 1958, stating, "Upon the honest advice of many competent people I have decided that to insist on my right to enroll at Mississippi Southern College at this point perhaps would not be in the best interest of the general community."[150] It is not known precisely why Kennard chose to bow out at that moment. This was a time when not just the commission, but several members of Kennard's community spoke against his protest. There are limits to how long and how effectively activists could push through constant opposition.

[149] Dittmer, *Local People*, 79-236.
[150] SCR # 1-27-0-22-1-1-1.

The other option was to bow to the pressure, either fully or partly. This method was controversial then and now because it risked weakening the movement. As seen in Dr. Biettel's case, cutting out people cut down a movement already lacking in full support. Braden wrote about this issue, stating "The evidence is mounting that there is a direct cause-and-effect relationship between this labeling process and the shortage of people ready to act for integration."[151] One of the sovereignty commission's main goals was to cultivate an atmosphere of fear and stigma around left-wing activism. They did this by systematically spying on and knee-capping activists and other forms of protests. These tactics not only limited activists but scared off those who may be tempted to join them. By bowing to the commission's pressure, they were validating the narrative that being an active was something that would get one marked as a traitor and pariah. However, some scholars argue that the extent of these disavowals is exaggerated.

On the other hand, there was a futility in trying to appease segregationists in a movement that was fundamentally anti-segregation. Activist Lawrence Guyot, like other politically active alumni, praised Tougaloo College for facilitating students' desire for activism and political engagement. "It was committed to academic freedom, committed to growth, and to leadership. Its very existence was threatened by the state legislature, but they continued to move ahead."[152] Whichever strategy they chose, the level of backlash would continue. There was also a risk regardless of how quiet or loud or radical or conservative they tried to lean. The problem was less with what way the activists carried

[151] Anne Braden, *HUAC: Bulwark of Segregation*, (New York, 1963), 5.
[152] Lawrence Guyot, (Tougaloo Alum), interview by Julian Bond, December 3, 2010, Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/item/2015669153/.

out their mission than the fact that they carried it out at all. As such, no matter what path they chose they had little choice but to “move ahead” through adversity.

The southern red scare’s influence is less obvious in their stories. Notably, McCain said here that he did not believe Kennard was "sent" by the NAACP.[153] This contrasts with McCain’s views on segregation, which he explained in a speech in 1960 for the MSSC’s Speaker’s Bureau. "When we hear of any Negro trying to get into a white school in Mississippi, you can be sure it is a Negro who has just been imported for that purpose.”[154] Kennard was in prison when these remarks were given, but McCain’s views on segregation pre-date his meeting Kennard.[155] It could be that he was branded as such after the fact. Even though Kennard worked independent of any civil rights group, his protest branded him subversive and influenced the commission’s decision to attack. Similarly, Dr. Biettel was also labeled guilty by the association because of his numerous defenses of student activists.[156]

[153] SCR ID # 1-27-0-6-10-1-1.
[154] SCR ID # 99-105-0-1-1-1-1.
[155] Minchin & Salmond, “’The Saddest Story,’” 197-201.
[156] Williamson-Lott, “Ebony Tower,” 7.

Conclusion

The attacks against Clyde Kennard and Tougaloo College, though separate events, were part of a larger problem with activists succumbing to segregationist backlash. Tougaloo's rise as a movement center was remarkable given the conditions, but it was always vulnerable to outside interference. If Tougaloo was in Mississippi, white supremacists would find a way to subject it to the state's laws and customs. Similarly, Kennard would never have made it into MSC because of his race. The attempts to appease, attack, reason with, or submit to segregationists always ended the same. There was little the movement could do against the power of an entire government alone.

The blending of red baiting with white supremacist rhetoric demonstrated southern white supremacists' ability to adapt to changing conditions. It provided a more respectable justification for their campaigns against civil rights activists. It also became a useful shorthand for any kind of liberal activity. It successfully instilled an atmosphere of fear and confusion that weakened the movement but did not stop it. Red baiting combined with their power over the south's institutions and use of non-violent terror made them a formidable force. However, the segregationists' ultimate capitulation to racial progress shows that the stakes were not as severe as their efforts made it seem.

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