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Christian Wayne April 11, 2017

The Manifestation of Southern White Identity in Southeastern Conference (SEC) Football

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An abstract of
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American Studies

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Abstract

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This work examines the football teams of the Southeastern Conference (SEC) and how they are reflections, projections, and bastions of southern white identity. By exploring a history of how a southern, white identity was created in the American South, we can understand how and why football became the cultural institution it is in today's American South throughout the twentieth century and into present-day. By understanding this, the paper aims to explore how today's fans, higher educational administrators, students, and players should be using this understanding of southern white culture's tie to SEC football to help create a better system of college athletics. After laying out an argument in conjunction with a historiography of these topics, the paper uses a case study on the University of Mississippi – a school known for its racial conflicts on campus surrounding Confederate symbolism and iconography. The University of Mississippi is the SEC school most known for its ties to Confederate symbolism and southern white culture. How it has dealt with those ties provides other schools with an idea of how we can confront these problems at hand.

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Acknowledgements

I acknowledge all of the faculty that I have had the pleasure of working with over the past 4 years. To Dr. Loudermilk, Dr. McGehee, and Dr. Ashmore, thank you for sitting on my committee and providing valuable insights and feedback throughout the process.

Thank you to all of the faculty and staff at Oxford College of Emory University. My two years were instrumental in my personal and academic development.

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The air is as crisp and dry as the leaves falling off of the trees, yet it is filled with smoky warmth that trickles through the air leaving a smell that can only be described as a special kind of combination of sweetness and spice. As I walk through the parking lots filled with sounds of sizzling pork and grown men bellowing at television screens powered by juiced up portable generators, I see a blur of orange and blue as tens of thousands of people walk through the jam-packed streets of Gainesville, FL. I finally make my way into the stadium trudging up four large ramps with the other fans. My father and I find our seats; two seats marked by two double-digit, black, block numbers on a hard, metal bench. We sit down only to stand up again as the band, in their blue and white regalia, play "Orange and Blue." Finally, the moment 92,000 fans have been waiting for nine months to see has arrived. On the hundred foot jumbotron, a video plays of a menacing alligator swimming through the waters to a song eerily similar to the theme of *Jaws*. Tens of thousands of fans clap their hands in unison, mimicking the jaws of an alligator clamping down on its prey. A deep, rumbling voice says, "The Swamp, only Gators get out alive." At that moment, the men in orange and blue sprint out of the tunnel to the enthusiastic and maniacal scream of ninety-two thousand fans. After nine months of waiting, the Florida Gators have taken the field for their first football game of the new season. After nine months, college football has returned, and the most important day in the South is no longer Sunday, but Saturday. This is the Southeastern Conference (SEC). This is part of life in the American South.

Introduction – Don't Get Married on a Fall Saturday

When getting married in the South, you are supposed to never schedule the wedding date on a Saturday in the fall. If you do so, you will likely receive many RSVPs with a circle around the answer, "I have a prior conflict." And really, you do not even have to ask what that conflict

is. If you have to, you probably are not a true southerner in the eyes of many southerners. In the South, people reserve their fall Saturdays for one event and one event only: college football. More specifically, Saturday is reserved for SEC football. Founded in 1933 by thirteen schools that split from the Southern Conference, the Southeastern Conference (SEC) is a cultural phenomenon standing the test of time in the South for almost eighty-five years (Weisband). The conference encompasses the entire southeastern United States with teams from Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas – all states that were part of the Confederate States of America. The SEC has been home to dynasties, award-winning players and coaches, and unruly and overzealous fan bases. The wealthiest of the conferences in the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) Division-I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS), the SEC has the funding not only to compete and create the best athletic programs but leave other colleges' programs looking like high schools. Great demand generates that wealth and the incredible passion from the southern fan base is what fuels that demand.

Ignoring the screaming of 90 to 100,000 fans at the top of their lungs every Saturday in the fall is difficult – especially if it can trigger seismic activity[1] – but somehow people forget that SEC football is a peculiar phenomenon. Think about it. Every Saturday, tens of thousands of mostly white and middle class fans congregate in ritualistic fashion after overeating and drinking to watch teams comprised predominantly of black players wearing forms of armor exert brute force to score points (SBRnet). When simplified to a base level, that sounds a lot like the Romans watching gladiators in the Coliseum; in other words, football is a game of barbarism and savagery, allowing fans to indulge their deeply-rooted fascination and taste for violence.

[1] In 1988, LSU fans were so loud during a game-winning touchdown that seismographs located a few miles away registered an earthquake (Calongne).

But football in the South, and the rest of America, is so much more than just a violent indulgence or thrill, and frankly, viewing it as such detracts from its cultural and educational value as a sport and reduces those involved in the game to blood-thirsty fight spectators. Football is a cultural event with fans becoming personally and mentally involved in the, projecting themselves into the game and asserting their masculine prowess. The game becomes focused on personal bragging rights, and winning creates a sense of dominance over others while losing equates to a loss of power and masculinity. Winning makes you a part of the in-group. Anyone who says that football is just a game could not be further from the truth as many fans of teams in the SEC begin to identify as members of the teams. For instance, I identify as a Florida Gator, and I always refer to the team as "we" despite having no physical place on the team. While being from Gainesville, Florida makes me more likely to be a fan, I have never played for the Florida Gators football team nor have I ever attended the University of Florida as a student. I am just a fan who grew up in southern culture and became attached to this team.

I became a fan of football was when I was pressured by so many other southern boys in southern Georgia to like the sport. If you did not like it, how could you be seen as masculine and powerful? Competition was important, and winning was everything. These same southern boys would even pick teams for pickup football games based on political party affiliation! It was a culture that celebrated the winner and demoralized the loser. I ended up picking the Florida Gators as my favorite team – the arch rival of those southern Georgia boys' favorite team, the Georgia Bulldogs. When Florida would beat Georgia, *I* would have bragging rights, and if I found a fellow Gator fan at nine-years-old, he would be my brother-in-arms against the Georgia Bulldogs and Florida State Seminoles. My family's move to Gainesville cemented my fandom; I could join thousands of others in unison behind one symbol – the Gators. I had a team and a

culture of which to be a part. Looking back on how I became so invested in this culture and observing the culture around me at Florida Gator games sparked my interest in exploring why SEC football is so important in the American South.

The SEC has reached a point where success on the field and passion for the team are tradition, and as we will see later, tradition in the South can be a very contentious thing. How and why SEC football has come to possess such an incredibly passionate and competitive southern white fan base is complicated. Because white southerners invest so much of their identity in the teams of the SEC and the SEC itself, southern white identity became intimately connected with SEC football. The SEC football team is not only a cultural phenomenon but a cultural symbol representing many different groups of a region that has experienced a tumultuous and complicated history involving violent conflict. The SEC took shape over the haunted grounds of slavery, and race cannot be ignored in a discussion of southern culture and its representations. As one scholar on the American South, Andrew Doyle, stated, "Southern college football is a complex and richly nuanced cultural text that offers insights into the searing internal conflicts that beset the South" ("Turning the Tide" 28). These conflicts surround race and region and the battle for dominance over cultural and social hierarchies. As the SEC rose to power in college football and became a center of culture in the American South during the twentieth century, conservative, southern white identity manifested in the teams of the SEC as fans shaped many SEC teams to be representations and symbols of the American South, associating them with Confederate iconography, Lost Cause mythology, and southern white masculinity.

Chapter 1 – Foundations of Southern White Identity

I must point to the complicated nature of SEC football and the American South. SEC football is so intimately connected to southern culture that it is difficult to pull one thread without pulling the others all at once. In other words, sports teams and organizations are abstract. While there is a physical production on the field or court, the idea of the team, a fan, and the relationship between them is more intangible than tangible. The relationship extends to an array of different concepts such as collective memory, regional representations, personal representations, and cultural traditions. No one identity or representation can define the South. SEC football is not the sole cultural event to be studied in order to understand the American South and southern whites. But SEC football is still a significant representation of the American South and southern white identity. Qualifying its representation as just one of many downplays the significance of this cultural phenomenon in southern white culture. The weekly event of SEC football would become an event tied to the region and its historical and cultural symbols.

Southern history and the formation of a southern white identity would be the foundation for SEC football fandom in the twentieth century. The process of that formation began before the American Revolution when the differences between the southern and northern colonies started to form, allowing for us to see the stark contrast between the North and South and why southern white identity was built on insecurity and fragility. Although southern colonies "contributed to a whopping two-thirds of the colonial economy from 1768 to 1772," stereotypes of southerners told a completely different story (Cobb, *Away Down South* 9-10). Southerners were characterized – one can argue they still are today – to be stupid, dumb, and lazy, despite having created an effective economic system. Unfortunately, the success of that economic system was dependent on slavery (T. Thompson 11). Slavery was the reason behind the success of the southern

colonies' economic system, and slavery would, in turn, become one of the foundations for how southern identity came to be.

Looking back on the American Colonial Era, we can see with twenty/twenty hindsight how the separation between the North and South began with what would seem to be the most insignificant of differences – geography and climatology. According to James Cobb, geography was the determinant of the economies of each subset of colonies (*Away Down South* 9-10). New England and the Middle Colonies dealt with rocky and mountainous terrain, making an agrarian economy difficult to develop and sustain. Thus, the northern colonies had to adapt and create a more "diversified approach to agricultural and industrial development," while the southern colonies were able to take advantage of an environment perfect for mass agricultural production, as long as the South had a labor force that could take on such a task (Cobb, *Away Down South* 9-10). While the North's wealth was distributed more evenly, the southern colonies experienced an economy bolstered on the shoulders of the southern land and slaveowners operating massive plantations (Cobb, *Away Down South* 9-10).The differences were clear, and because traveling outside of one's state was difficult and a rare occurrence, northerners relied on the writings and hearsay of others to develop their opinions of the South. For example, many foreign-born writers like J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur would travel throughout the South, documenting the barbaric savagery of slavery and describing southerners as "heedless and lazy" (qtd. in Cobb, *Away Down South* 12). Although slavery was legal in those days throughout the entire country, the North attempted to elevate itself by rationalizing that northern slaves were considered a part of the family, a stark contrast to Crevecoeur's depiction of a slave "hanging from a tree, his eyes pecked out by birds and flesh being devoured by insects, still alive but praying for death" (qtd. in Cobb, *Away Down South* 13). Even before the founding of the United States, southern whites

were defending their ideological and moral positions against northern objections. The insecurity of southerners began to develop, and southerners had reason to feel as if the North was casting them as other or un-American. Once tensions had begun to escalate between the North and the South at the middle of the nineteenth century, the North began to see the South as "not merely a benign aberration from the American norm but an invasive, potentially mortal threat to the nation's health and progress," according to Cobb (Cobb, *Away Down South* 34). There was a clear divide, and it would lead to the American Civil War.

Yet, slavery was the backbone of the South, and without it, southern leaders felt their economy would not survive. Tracy Thompson says in her book, *The New Mind of the South*, "individually, [southerners] fought [the American Civil War] for a variety of reasons; collectively, they fought to preserve and expand an economic system based on slavery" (T. Thompson 9). Other historians like John Coski qualify that defending slavery was a major reason for the war, but it was not the only one. In agreement with Thompson's claim, Coski points to how "as in any war, the men who fought for the Confederacy were not responsible for precipitating the conflict. Even during the Confederacy's short life, resentment arose over what the southern populace perceived to be a 'rich man's war and a poor man's fight" ("Confederate Battle Flag" 96). Coski goes on to say in his book, *The Confederate Battle Flag*, that many southern men fought in the war because "they held to constitutional and moral beliefs that were widely accepted in their own time" that they were allowed to protest and rebel against a federal government impeding on their self-determination (*Confederate Battle Flag* 21-22). So, while southern white men of lower classes fought the war to preserve some sense of self-determination, it seems that the southern white elite perpetuated the war to preserve the system of slave labor on which they were so dependent.

In his book, *The Myth of the Lost Cause: Why the South Fought the Civil War and Why the North Won,* Edward H. Bonekemper III criticized the Lost Cause myth's contention that slavery was not the root cause of the war. Bonekemper quotes Michael C.C. Adams's analysis when he states that southern leaders "embraced states' rights when convenient but insisted that national authorities return fugitive slaves, overriding the states' rights protest of northern local officials" (qtd. in Bonekemper 37). This evidence suggests that southern leaders' interests in keeping slaves clearly overrode interests of states' rights. Bonekemper also illuminates the extent of slave ownership in the states that seceded to form the Confederacy. According to his studies, "each of the first six states to secede had a slave population between 44 and 57 percent of the total population," while "each of the last five states to secede had a slave population between 25 and 33 percent of the total" (Bonekemper 38). It was in the best interests of these southern leaders to keep such a massive labor force under control as they did. Of course, if these pieces of evidence were not enough, the seceding states wrote the reasoning into their secession documents. South Carolina "complained that northern states had condemned slavery as sinful" and that there had been "an increasing hostility on the part of non-slaveholding states to the institution of slavery" (Bonekemper 40). Mississippi wrote, "Our position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery – the greatest material interest of the world" (qtd. in Bonekemper 41-42). States such as Florida, Alabama, and Texas went all used similar language (Bonekemper 42-44). Clearly, slavery was a root cause of secession and the Civil War, and while southern white men of lower classes may have had different reasoning from the elites, according to Coski, their reasoning was still tied to a preservation of slavery and white supremacy in the American South.

After the war was over and the South had been brutally invaded and defeated, the reasoning behind the southern states' secession was blurred by white southerners, and we then began to see Lost Cause mythology rise in popularity as the result of an insecure, fragile and defensive southern white male identity. According to Bonekemper's definition, the Lost Cause "is a collection of fictions, lies, and component myths that purport to explain why much of the South seceded from the Union and why the Confederacy lost the Civil War" (Bonekemper 2). Civil War historian Gary Gallagher stated that "because the Confederacy lost so unequivocally, its citizens probably devoted more energy to [creating a 'suitable public memory'] than their Northern counterparts. . . . The Myth . . . tried to rationalize the institution of slavery and the heroic performance of Confederate leaders and soldiers" (qtd. in Bonekemper 2-3). Confederate leaders attempted to repair and present the southern ethos in a better light after being humiliated. The South was the black sheep of the country, seen as filled with savage and barbaric men who had fought for the right to own other human beings as mere possessions and objects. Why else would Jefferson Davis have had asserted in his memoirs that "The existence of African servitude was in no wise the cause of the conflict. . . but only an incident" (qtd. in Bonekemper 11)? General Robert E. Lee told one news reporter after his surrender that "slavery had already been moving toward extinction by the time that war broke out," and Alexander Stephens said that slavery was only a central issue because it was a subsidiary of the real question at hand over "Federation" and "Centralism" (qtd. in Bonekemper 11). In the decades after the war, the leaders of the Confederacy were clearly attempting to downplay any question of slavery being a root cause. According to them, this was a war about a political disagreement and not the moral nature of southern white men who fought "valiantly" for a cause in which they believed. Southern white

men were not the keepers of prisoners, but rather, they wanted America to know that they were a prisoner the North.

Despite discrepancies of class, Lost Cause mythology was not borne from only southern white leadership thought. Confederate veterans and Confederate memorial groups perpetuated the Lost Cause myth as well. The veterans and memorial groups' perpetuation led to a foundation for symbols such as the St. Andrew's cross Confederate battle flag to be remembered as a symbol of Confederate valor and honor rather than in association with the root cause of the conflict. For instance, Carlton McCarthy, a Confederate veteran who wrote the 1882 *Detailed Minutia of Soldier Life in the Army of Northern Virginia*, said that the St. Andrew's cross flag "was not the flag of the Confederacy, but simply the banner . . . of the Confederate soldier. As such it should not share in the condemnation which our *cause* received, or suffer from its downfall. The whole world can unite in a chorus of praise to the gallantry of the men who followed where this banner led" (qtd. in Coski, *Confederate Battle Flag* 19-20). McCarthy was separating himself and all other Confederate veterans from the root cause of the war – slavery. Instead, McCarthy called for people to honor and pay respect toward Confederate veterans who bravely fought a war for a cause that they believed in, which as Coski pointed to earlier, could have been about self-determination. Even then, McCarthy was erasing the humiliation that came with losing the war. Essentially, no matter what cause they fought for, southern white men failed to win and defeat the North, losing not only their rights to own slaves and but also their rights to self-determination. And as Coski illuminates, "whether or not they owned slaves, white southerners had a stake in slavery as a system of racial control and a source of identity. As Jefferson Davis explained to Mississippi voters in 1851, 'The institution of negro slavery, as it now exists among us, is necessary to the *equality* of the *white* race' " (qtd. in *Confederate Battle*

Flag 25). Southern white, masculine identity had been emasculated and demoralized, and after a system of slavery and control had been forcefully uprooted, southern white men had to find ways to maintain the status quo and to continue the traditional institutions they possessed.

The Lost Cause myth created a foundation on which Confederate symbolism in the modern era could stand. One of the most divisive symbols in the contemporary United States is the Confederate battle flag, depicting a blue St. Andrew's cross on a red background. The flag and other symbols associated with Confederate history have been used by many different organizations from the Ku Klux Klan and neo-Confederates to the football teams of the SEC – most notably the University of Mississippi which will be discussed later. A key tenet of the Lost Cause mythology argued by the Confederate veterans and their followers was "that the battle flag is an apolitical symbol distinct from the Confederacy's national flags, and therefore not objectionable to a reunited America" (Coski, *Confederate Battle Flag* 19-20). This idea set up the foundation for the modern traditionalist's argument that the Confederate flag is now a memorial to those Confederate veterans who fought for a cause in which they believed. Traditionalists also "defend continued displays of Confederate flags and monuments by arguing that we must remember and respect the history, traditions, and culture of the South. Attempts to remove Confederate flags and monuments from public display are but profane efforts to deny the best qualities of Southern life" (Martinez and Richardson 6). Traditionalists often say that they are defending their tradition and heritage, but that tradition and heritage are not the totalizing identifiers of an all-encompassing southern culture – a culture that can define the entire region. Rather, their traditions are part of the specific southern white culture this work discusses. If we take a look at Coski's argument, the Confederate battle flag was, indeed, a symbol of the Confederate soldier. The flag "originated as the battle flag of Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern

Virginia and became the most prominent of the many flags that Confederate military units carried on the battle field" (Coski, "Confederate Battle Flag" 89). According to Coski, Confederate soldiers were deeply attached to their flags: "During the formal surrender on April 12, 1865. . . reluctantly, with agony of expression, they tenderly fold their flags, battle-worn and torn, blood-stained, heart-holding colors, lay them down; some frenziedly rushing from their ranks, kneeling over them, clinging to them, pressing them to their lips with burning tears" (qtd. in "Confederate Battle Flag" 96). Coski argues that there was an "undeniable bond between the common soldier of the Confederacy and the St. Andrew's cross flag" ("Confederate Battle Flag" 96). But Coski qualifies that despite the variance among Confederate soldiers' reasoning for fighting in the war, "the St. Andrew's cross is inherently associated with slavery" because the soldiers were fighting for a nation that fought for the right to own slaves (*Confederate Battle Flag* 26). And taking Coski's logic further, the Confederate flag becomes a symbol of southern white culture. After the war, Richmond editor and historian Edward A. Pollard said that the South's defeat "did not mean that the South must concede the error of states' rights or the inferiority of Southern civilization, including white supremacy" (qtd. in Coski, "Confederate Battle Flag" 104).

In this way, Lost Cause mythology becomes a case for white supremacy, showing that despite the South's defeat and whether or not slavery was a reason, the valor and honor of Confederate veterans shows the supposed superiority of southern whites. Because the flag was so deeply associated with Lost Cause mythology as it was "an integral part of Confederate memorial rituals and of the Confederate organizations," the flag is not only a symbol of southern white culture but one of white supremacy as well (Coski, "Confederate Battle Flag" 101-02). So when SEC football teams were imbued with southern and Confederate myths, images, and

symbols like the Confederate battle flag, they effectively became representations of southern white culture. How those myths, images, and symbols came to be associated with many of the teams will be discussed later.

Southerners felt that the North looked down upon them with disdain over slavery, and the years of Reconstruction after the war delivered gut punches to the southern white man as he watched the black man gain the right to vote and take public office throughout the South. Over 1,500 positions were afforded black men in public office – positions southern white men considered to be theirs (Foner). Not only had the North humiliated the South in war, but now the group of people who were subordinate in the South for so long had gained power. Thompson argues that Confederate nationalism continued in southern culture as southerners enacted Jim Crow laws serving to maintain the white supremacy that came previously with a system of racial control through slavery (T. Thompson 9-10). Yet, it is necessary to take that a step further. A perceived loss of political and social control for southern white men would lead to the enacting of Jim Crow era laws and politics in the South. With the loss of the Civil War and the system of slavery, southern white men would attempt to employ systems of racial control for years after Reconstruction – systems that would give rise to the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 60s. With the Civil Rights Movement, a conservative South would find itself in a reactionary phase again by "asserting the primacy of property rights and freedom from government intervention" (T. Thompson 9-10). Freedom from government intervention was an important theme in SEC schools' fight against integration, both academically and athletically, as we will discuss later. But the South's staunch defense of tradition, conservatism, and archaic power structures continues in American history. The South's defense led to other Americans across the country labeling it as a racist, deplorable, uncultured, and uneducated region – a white American

Other visibly the same as other American whites but very different from the rest of white America.

Despite being a part of the dominant power group in America, white Southerners in the 1960s – far removed from the American Civil War and Reconstruction – still felt they were being characterized by racist and barbaric stereotypes throughout the twentieth century. Ironically, the South served for the rest of the nation as a "moral lightning rod, a deflector of national guilt, a scapegoat for stricken conscience, much as [black people] [had] served the white supremacist - as a floor under national self-esteem" (Cobb, *Away Down South* 217-18). But while the rest of the nation saw the South as being a place filled with savagery, violence, racism, and slavery, how did southern whites see themselves? According to Cobb, one defining factor of southern white identity was not necessarily that the South was just simply a different place from the rest of the country, but rather that the North did not represent all of what it means to be American (Cobb, *Away Down South* 219). In other words, the South wanted everyone to know that it was just as American as the North, but the South thought that the North failed to realize that a lack of regional cultural homogenization did not mean that some regions were more or less American than others.

Thompson notes that southerners love their history, and generally, they are conservative and resistant to change. Although, she points out the irony in this as the South has seen more change in structural and social systems than any other region in the United States. Thompson even jokes that southerners are so attached to tradition "because tradition in the South is like beachfront property in an era of global warming: as much as you love the view, you live with the knowledge that some morning you will wake up and find it gone" (T. Thompson 10-11). Perhaps, constant change and contradiction is why the South has generally been considered the

more conservative of American regions. When faced with constant change, is it not natural for people to react and create backlash, holding on to stable traditions of old? And yet, Cobb brings up how some like Larry King in the 1960s and 70s argued that a New South of the twentieth century wanted to not necessarily prove that it was as good as the North, but rather that the North "was no better than the South" (Cobb, *Away Down South* 219). King made his claim in conjunction with President Jimmy Carter's election, which was seen as a huge victory for the South. But did having a president from the South assert southern identity or actually take away from it? As other writers like Sheldon Hackney and W.J. Cash have claimed, the white South is a "counterculture," and white southerners are "Americans who have taken on an additional identity through conflict with the North" (qtd. in Cobb, *Away Down South* 219). An effective claim can surely be made that the southern white identity only exists when perceived as being attacked by something else – essentially, it is conservative and reactionary in nature. So, eventually we begin to see an interesting, complex, and contradictory dynamic of southern white – and even more specifically, masculine – identity where many interests are at play. Some southern whites cling to the old social structures, reacting to radical, new movements. Others may aspire to uplift themselves to a "northern standard," and others may just want the rest of the nation to realize that the South is just as much a part of the country as they are.

The South finds itself between a rock and a hard place: should southerners fight to keep the culture of old, or should it strive to become homogenized with an American culture? The former could continue to contribute to the perceived stereotypes of southern whites, making the South continue to appear as a lowly, racist place. The latter poses a risk of cultural assimilation, which could override a culture that so many southern whites treasure and value. Because of this question, self-contradiction appears, contributing to the insecurity and fragility of southern

whites. This insecurity and fragility can lead southern whites to believe whole-heartedly in the Lost Cause mythology and *Gone with the Wind* lore because these ideas nullify inklings of guilt, and these ideas help bring a sense of secure honor, holding the South to be a better place than what others believe it to be. Yet, Lost Cause mythology and glorification of Old Southern culture fails to acknowledge that lynchings and Jim Crow era laws were in place to control black people as subordinate human beings in the South. The existence of that violence and those laws alone illustrates how southern whites compensated for the lack of an organized system of slavery. This renders the Lost Cause narrative moot because it was never about uplifting southern honor and culture but rather hiding the severity and barbarism of slavery. The effects of the Lost Cause narrative would lead southern whites to find different ways to assert their security and power; one the primary ways was through SEC football. The self-contradiction and insecurity of white, southern identity would continue into the twentieth century. While the world was changing around them and the North continued to ostracize the South, white southerners would soon find a new avenue to take in asserting their cultural values of strength and resiliency. That avenue would be football; a modern and popularly accepted form of violence to the rest of America and a way to proclaim and secure southern pride and identity.

Chapter 2 – History of Southern Football

The Pre-Snap to SEC Football

While many present-day Americans recognize the southern passion for college football, not many know there were times when the sport was an afterthought to southerners' minds. American football rose in popularity and structure within the northeast – especially in the Ivy

League institutions.[2] Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, more teams began to form in the elite colleges and universities of the U.S., while the rules and play of the game became more standardized. Games became increasingly popular and competitive, and university administrations began to understand the economic opportunity football's popularity presented. Football would eventually become popular in the colleges and universities of the South and Midwest, but in the 1890s, the game was not played or watched nearly as much in those regions as it was in the northeast (Roberts 40). In their book, *Rising Tide: Bear Bryant, Joe Namath, and Dixie's Last Quarter*, Randy Roberts and Ed Krzemienski describe America's other national pastime, baseball, as being a sport "whose ideology emphasized democracy and America's rural heritage, [while] football was unabashedly elitist and aggressively modern." Football was being constructed and sculpted within the upper ranks of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton men as a method to prove their masculinity which would be needed for the leadership positions they would attain once they were finished with their education (Roberts 40). Not only was the sport elitist, it served as a way for a man to secure his masculinity. In her book, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917,* Gail Bederman notes "a number of social, economic, and cultural changes were converging to make the ongoing gender process especially active for the American middle class" (Bederman 11). To

[2] Before the Civil War, intercollegiate athletics began in the North. In 1852, the first intercollegiate athletic event was a crew race between Ivy League powers Harvard and Yale at Lake Winnepesaukee in New Hampshire. Seventeen years later in 1869, Rutgers and Princeton would go to battle in the first intercollegiate football game. In terms of game rules and structure, the game was almost nothing like what we see today as it was much more characteristic of rugby than today's American football. But nonetheless, intercollegiate sports were beginning to rise in popularity among the masses. Within the next half century, football became a popular sport, and the sport was dominated by the Ivy League (Masteralexis et. al.).

summarize, Bederman argues that “middle-class power and authority were being challenged in a variety of ways which middle-class men interpreted – plausibly – as a challenge to their manhood” (Bederman 11). Because of economic changes undermining old ideas of manliness, men took to new avenues to show off and achieve a masculine, physical prowess – one of these avenues was football (Bederman 11-15). As football trickled down to the South, perhaps southern white men saw how football could achieve this manliness that had been taken away by defeat in the Civil War.

The South lagged behind in both interest and competitiveness in football due to the differences from the North that had always plagued the South – education and a poor economy. While football was becoming a staple of American cultural life at the beginning of the twentieth-century, football in the American South could not become as popular as it was in the Northeast and the Midwest because of the lack of educational funding. Most southerners dropped out of primary school to support their families and join the agrarian economy. This left southern colleges and universities with a low supply of incoming students, which resulted in a lack of funding and an inability to even field a football team (Roberts 42). In the early years of college football, students were not recruited on athletic scholarships to attend and play like they are today. The American South’s societal problems continued to influence northern perceptions of the South being “a cultural desert of illiteracy, hookworm, and racism, where the Ku Klux Klan reigned supreme and ‘natural’ leaders wallowed in the memory of the Lost Cause” (Roberts 43). On the field of play, the South’s football teams were viewed as easy wins for the teams of the North. Some of the best early twentieth century southern teams like the University of Virginia and Vanderbilt University were slaughtered by the Ivy League powers of the North. Football teams like Pennsylvania and Princeton would use contests against southern teams much like

today's Alabama Crimson Tide and Ohio State Buckeyes schedule "cupcake" teams from lower collegiate divisions as "warm-up games, intended as easy wins and confidence builders" (Roberts 43). In one laughable instance, citizens of Nashville, Tennessee took pride in Vanderbilt's eighteen point loss to the University of Michigan; "the *Nashville American* proclaimed it Vanderbilt's greatest triumph since the team was organized" (Roberts 43). Football was seemingly shaping up to be another way for the North to chastise and stomp on the South. It was clear that all the other differences that accounted for the South's place in American culture were physically manifesting themselves onto the gridiron.

When the Tide Turned

Despite the South's early ineptitude in the sport, football teams in southern colleges and universities started to churn and create momentum in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Throughout the South, "progressive-minded[3] southerners [were] eager to build a rationalized industrial society," and they saw football – "the fashionable sport of the northeastern bourgeoisie" – as a tool to take them into the new century (Doyle, "Turning the Tide" 28). Much like how other sports teams create a brand and identity stemming from the culture of the surrounding region, the University of Alabama and other southern schools "developed colorful traditions that harkened back to the South's Cavalier and Lost Cause mythology" (Roberts 44). Important in the progress of the South's interests in football was how those same progressive-minded southerners used symbols of antebellum, southern pride to boost southern interest in the sport (Doyle, "Turning the Tide" 29). Simply put, it worked. Along with the fans, local sportswriters would consistently commend southern football teams' players for exemplifying chivalry and "martial spirit" (Roberts 44). Many southern schools began to institute traditions

[3] And by progressive-minded, what Doyle means is southern whites who looked to uplift the South – not necessarily the definition of "progressive" that is usually combined with political "liberalism" in today's political culture.

that called upon the symbolism of the Confederate spirit – traditions such as the playing of the minstrel song "Dixie" or Alabama's "Rammer Jammer" which referred to the yellowhammer Confederate soldiers from Alabama (Belanger). Auburn University's students would wave "The Bonnie Blue Flag" with pride at every football game – the flag being one of the first banners of the Confederacy in 1861 (Coski, *Confederate Battle Flag* 2). Roberts describes southern sportswriters who "struggled to get through a paragraph without employing some knightly image" or likening football plays to the acts of Confederate heroes (Roberts 44). For example, in reference to Alabama's win over Washington in the 1926 Rose Bowl, the *Atlanta Georgian* wrote the headline, "Dixie Acclaims Her Heroes" (qtd. in Doyle, "Causes Won" 197). Like the North, "southerners had transformed the game into something noble, courteous, and manly," but in the case of the South, football players were becoming the heroes of old – Confederate troops who fought valiantly and with honor (Roberts 44). So what was the South attempting to accomplish? Was this new interest in football a way for the South to uplift itself to the North's standards and become modern, or was the South attempting to manifest its culture to in a new way – a way that could accomplish both? Nothing was clear, and it seemed many southern whites were using football for different reasons.

Many scholars agree that college football began to take on a much larger significance in the South when the Alabama Crimson Tide rolled to one of the most important college football upsets in the twentieth century – the 1926 Rose Bowl.[4] Some of the top teams in the nation like Dartmouth, Michigan, Colgate, and Princeton all rejected invitations to play against the University of Washington in the game. Ranked fourth in the country and with an impressive

[4] For those not familiar with college football, the Rose Bowl was one of the most "prestigious and financially lucrative" post-season games at the time, and it is still in the pantheon of great bowls today (Doyle, "Turning the Tide" 30).

winning record, Alabama was hoping to be invited, but the team had yet to play a team not from the South. The Rose Bowl was reluctant to offer any team from the South a chance to play, its committee agent quipping, "I've never heard of Alabama as a football team" (qtd. in Doyle, "Turning the Tide" 30). But after multiple teams from the North decided against making the trek across the nation to Pasadena, California, the Rose Bowl begrudgingly offered an eager Alabama team the chance to prove its worth (Doyle, "Turning the Tide" 30). The game was not just a game anymore. The game was an opportunity to prove to the world that the South could play with the rest of America – both on and off the field.

Southerners placed incredible importance on this game. Before and during the 1920s, the South felt criticized for "religious bigotry, political corruption, and educational malfeasance" (Roberts 49). Roberts notes how Baltimore journalist H.L. Mencken admonished the South for being "America's great cultural wasteland" – a region completely devoid of "critics, musical composers, painters, sculptors, [and] architects" (qtd. in Roberts 49). This was nothing new, however. Mencken was simply taking the place of so many other writers and critics throughout American history who admonished the South. Thus, when Alabama beat Washington with a dramatic come-from-behind win, the state of Alabama *and* the entire South celebrated a cathartic victory against the rest of the nation. Finally, the South could say that it had beaten the North at its own game. Even Vanderbilt Coach Dan McGugin said, "Alabama was our representative in fighting for us against the world. I fought, bled, died and was resurrected with the Crimson Tide" (qtd. in Roberts 52). Headlines throughout the South hailed Alabama as the southern hero. It was not just a win for Alabama to cap off an incredible season; it was a win for the region against the critical mocking that came from the rest of the country (Roberts 52). One writer from the *Atlanta Journal* went as far as to say that "the Crimson Tide no longer belongs exclusively to Tuscaloosa

and the state of Alabama. It belongs to the whole South just like the Stone Mountain Memorial." In the *Atlanta Georgian*, the victory was proclaimed "the greatest victory for the South since the first battle of Bull Run" (qtd. in Doyle, "Turning the Tide" 37). Alabama's President Denny went so far as to say that Alabama "did it for the Anglo-Saxon race" – a stark reminder that the southern identity lauding over the Tide was built on the foundation of being white (qtd. in Roberts 53).

With Alabama's historic win, the southern college football team had reached a new and higher status within the mythic symbolism of Lost Cause iconography. It was a living memorial and treasure – a testament to the Old South in the New South. Despite being described in accordance with Old South values, Southern progressive leaders saw football much differently. According to Andrew Doyle, old southern values and symbols were embedded in football as a way for southern leadership and bourgeoisie to advance the South to meet northern ideals, while maintaining the rituals and pride that stemmed from the Old South. Contributing to the self-contradiction of southern white identity, "southern college football clearly illustrates how southerners expressed fervent devotion to the ideals of the past while simultaneously transforming those ideals in the service of a radically new socioeconomic regime" (Doyle, "Turning the Tide" 40). Doyle argues that the Southern pride that came with Alabama's Rose Bowl victory "obscured the emergence of southern football as a powerful symbol of progress, modernity, and sectional reconciliation" ("Turning the Tide" 40). The South was at odds with itself, because by becoming successful at football, the South was becoming, in effect, more like the North.

So was football a means to live up to the North, or to beat it? According to Doyle, one "could hardly pick up a copy of *Harper's, McClure's, Collier's, or Scribner's* without reading

about such evils as political demagoguery, the Ku Klux Klan, convict leasing, lynchings, sharecropping, or debt peonage" ("Causes Won" 200). We can infer that southern whites saw this football victory as a way to fight back against the poor images –no matter how true – that were perpetuated by outside media. For them, football was about victory and keeping the martial spirit of Confederate veterans and lore alive through football. But here is where we can find how the SEC team – and the southern team to put more broadly – can represent southern white identity. While Alabama represented these old ideals and values, Alabama was also, as Doyle identifies, a "symbol of modernity because they were winners" (Doyle, "Causes Won" 205). After winning the 1927 Rose Bowl as well, the two victories "served both as symbolic vengeance over historic enemies and as a plea for respect from those same enemies" (Doyle, "Turning the Tide" 40). The South was caught in a push and pull to the new and modern and from the old and traditional, respectively. Alabama and the southern college football team became a reflection of the twentieth-century South – one that reveled in the old traditions but was ultimately heading toward the modernity of a more homogenized America. But it is not that simple. I argue that southern whites would eventually make the sport their own unique tradition – so much so that the sport of football would become associated with the South in America. The South's passion for the game would create this association, and that passion stemmed from the fans' realization that this game was one where the South could beat the North. Thus, they would make the teams as much like the Confederate soldiers of the past as they could, attempting to reinforce Lost Cause mythology and amend the wounds of loss from the Civil War. And though southern progressives may have seen football as a public relations tool for the South to improve economic investment and stereotypes, the fans saw that it was a way to be secure and create a solid identity formed on winning and beating the North (Doyle, "Turning the Tide" 45-46).

The Confederate Flag, Dixiecrat Revolution, and Southern Colleges

White southerners were able to make football their own cultural event by imbuing it with Confederate symbolism, Confederate associations and Lost Cause mythology. As Coski presents in his various works, the St. Andrew's cross Confederate battle flag experienced a massive rise in popularity because of southern white college students' usage of the flag. And with this rise, the flag was no longer a symbol only of the Confederacy but a popular-culture symbol as well ("Confederate Battle Flag" 107). The flag was popularized by groups like the Kappa Alpha Order (KA). A fraternity known for its celebration of the Old South and southern chivalry, KA began using Confederate flags in conjunction with "elaborate 'Old South' balls and parades" in the 1920s (Coski, "Confederate Battle Flag" 107). And after Alabama's historic victory over Washington, the streets and lampposts of Tuscaloosa, Alabama were adorned with Confederate flags (Coski, "Confederate Battle Flag" 107).

However, the event that jumpstarted the Confederate flag's popularity among schools like Alabama, Auburn, LSU, and Mississippi was the Dixiecrat Movement in 1948. At the States' Rights Party (dubbed the Dixiecrat Party by the media) convention in Birmingham, Alabama in 1948, "University of Mississippi students showed up to the auditorium with a Confederate battle flag as 'the entire audience stood silently with hands over hearts" (Coski, "Confederate Battle Flag" 107). An Alabama student told a reporter, "Every fraternity at Tuscaloosa is flying a Confederate flag from the roof today" (qtd. in Coski, "Confederate Battle Flag" 109). But as one student newspaper reporter noticed, the flags only came out of the fraternities' attics if the North – or even a symbolic North such as controlling government – was "attempting to devour our Southern culture," as one student remarked (qtd.. in Coski, "Confederate Battle Flag" 110).

According to Coski, the Dixiecrat supporters interpreted the flag as a "quintessential symbol of states' rights" ("Confederate Battle Flag" 110).

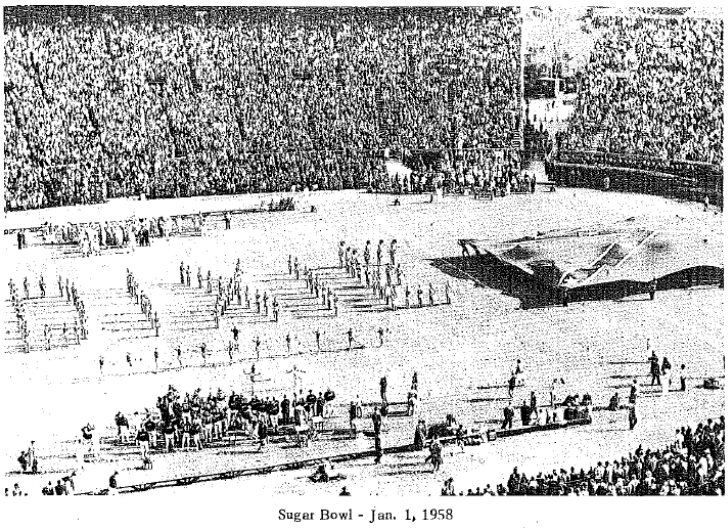

Figure 1 – The band's Confederate battle flag being unfurled at the 1958 Sugar Bowl. Source provided by Dr. Samuel Zebulon Baker. Part of Babcock's source. ***Courtesy of: J.D. Williams Collection, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, University of Mississippi.***

The schools of the SEC continued to celebrate the symbol in different ways yet similarly across the region. The school showing the most passion for the Confederate battle flag was, by far, the University of Mississippi. After the Dixiecrat Movement, "the school's home economics department sewed and painted a huge Confederate battle flag that the band carried onto the field at half time" (Pictured in Figure 1) (Coski, *Confederate Battle Flag* 107). Game programs discussed the significance of this flag in particular. One program from 1960 posited that the flag stood "for the freedom of inquiry." It went on to say that "the Rebels truly honor and respect the traditions of our State and our Southland and in the same spirit, they rebel against dictatorship whether from without or within" (Babcock). In the 1949 edition of *Ole Miss,* the school's yearbook, the giant Confederate flag was first shown, and in the athletics pages, depictions of Mississippi's SEC foes' mascots showed how they lost to the Rebels (*Ole Miss* (1949) 222). For instance, the yearbook illustrated the Georgia Bulldogs as a small bulldog puppy who was fenced off from a fire hydrant with the Confederate battle flag on top. The Tulane Green Wave was illustrated by a wave with an arm waving a flag in a truce-like manner. Of course, the flag was not white but embellished with the St. Andrew's cross. Interestingly, the

Rebels lost 20-7 against the Green Wave that year (*Ole Miss* (1949) 227). In the Fall of 1948, "the school's ROTC commemorated the centennial and the services of the University Greys by dressing in Confederate uniforms and black hats and carrying Confederate battle flags" (Coski, *Confederate Battle Flag* 107). Coski points out that these events did not occur "until months after Ole Miss students showed their colors in the rebellion against Harry Truman and his civil rights reform proposals" (*Confederate Battle Flag* 107). Clearly, these were reactionary protests of political legislation surrounding the South's system of racism. So not only were these symbols associated with the Confederacy and its reasoning for civil war, the symbols were also used as conservative reactions to the Civil Rights Movement in the South.

Even SEC schools that most present-day fans would not think had used the Confederate battle flag did. KA chapters throughout the South would display the Confederate battle flag at their "Old South" balls, including those at the University of Georgia, University of South Carolina, and the University of Florida. In a move that no other SEC school had done, the University of Florida "adopted a variant of the Confederate battle flag as its official school flag" in 1952 (Coski, *Confederate Battle Flag* 126). The adopted flag placed a white cross on a blue background with six orange stars along the cross (Coski, *Confederate Battle Flag* 126). Throughout the 1950s, the

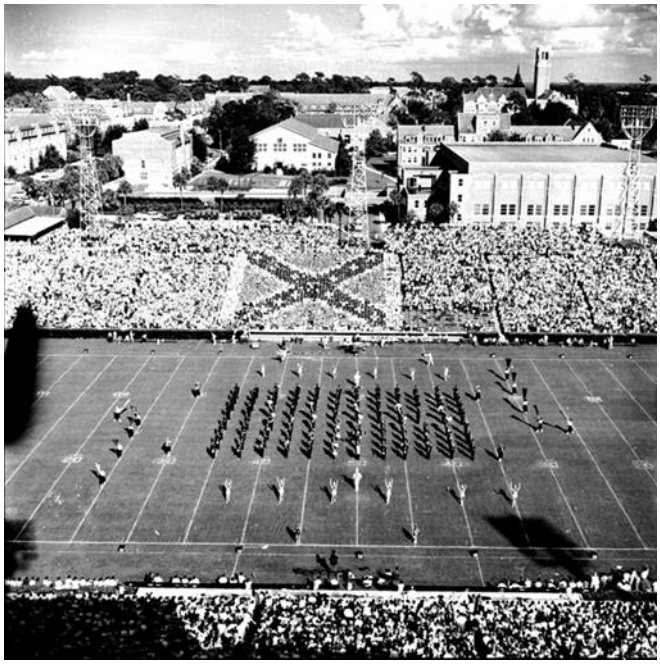

Figure 2 - Students holding up cards to form a Confederate flag at the University of Florida's Florida Field in the 1950s on the school's campus in Gainesville, Florida. *Courtesy of: University of Florida Digital Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida.*

flag could be seen at different events. As seen in Figure 2, the students at one game displayed the Confederate battle flag through a coordinated effort of holding cards. One of the most iconic games in Florida Gators history occurred against the Penn State Nittany Lions in the 1962 Gator Bowl. According to Derrick E. White, the game was "one of the few games that featured northern and southern teams during the 1962-1963 season" as "the Gator Bowl committee cast the University of Florida football team as a symbol for an embattled South under siege by the growing civil rights movement" (D. White 471). Already a turbulent with the Civil Rights Movement in full swing, white, southern pride and culture was tensed. White argues that Florida "embraced the game as one for Southern honor. Coaches framed media characterization of the selection as the 'lowliest bowl team of them all' as criticism of the entire region" (D. White 471). To psych out Penn State, Head Football Coach Ray Graves decided to "order a Confederate battle flag patch sewn on the team uniforms and replace the Gators' traditional block numbers on the helmets with a Confederate flag" (D. White 471). The band also played "Dixie," a staple of SEC teams' marching bands in the mid-twentieth century, and wave a Confederate flag (D. White 471-72). After the Gators upset the Nittany Lions, Graves commented, "'We sorta [felt] that we're upholding the honor of southern football'" (qtd. in D. White 472). What is so interesting is how Graves did not refer to southern and Confederate honor but rather the honor of the football team. With the context of the era and the events of the nation surrounding the event, Graves must have said this with a smirk as he obviously referred to the Lost Cause mythology of southern honor and the Confederate soldiers. The last remaining symbol of the Confederacy in association with the Florida Gators football team today is the minstrel song, "Swanee." Hidden in the pregame overtures, the song has not received any negative press, unlike the symbolism of the University of Mississippi today. As we can see, the mid-twentieth century saw a

monumental rise in the popularity of Confederate symbolism, and southern white fan bases imbued their favorite SEC teams with Confederate symbolism. So while teams like the 1926 and ’27 Alabama Crimson Tide helped the South move toward modernity, the mid-twentieth century showed that SEC institutions made football a southern white cultural institution, taking it away from its origins in the North.

The Beginnings of SEC Football’s Fight with Change

Football was not simply the game of white southerners as the game became popular amongst black southerners as well. A moneymaking opportunity that relied primarily on ticket sales at the time, college football would soon be opened up to black spectators by southern white college administrators. At the University of Mississippi, black fans were allowed to sit in a separated section, but nonetheless, allowed into the stadium (Baker 163). Vanderbilt was also the beneficiary of a black middle class located in Nashville, and school administrators saw the opportunity to turn the black middle class’s interest in the sport into more ticket revenue (Baker 168). These two SEC schools let black spectators in purely to drive profit, but it was also clear that money talked and money was money no matter who spent it. The game of football slowly began to put pressure on the pillar of segregation, contributing to segregation’s ultimate collapse because of team integration. Southern blacks were slowly making their way into this white sphere. But just as Alabama was both a symbol of old ways and modernity, the SEC football team of the mid-twentieth century represented segregation and a slow march toward modernity and integration.

With Alabama’s Rose Bowl wins in 1926 and 1927, there came a sense of ownership by southern whites in the sport and of the southern team. The sport became sacred in the minds and hearts of southerners, and it became a testament of elite white southern identity. Just as slavery

was a part of southern identity during the Civil War, segregation became a tenet of southern white identity by the 1930s. Segregation would play a large role in southern college football for decades to come after Alabama's wins. Throughout the mid-twentieth century, college administrators across the SEC staunchly resisted any form of integration. Whether it was their schools' football teams playing against integrated teams from other areas of the country or allowing black players onto their own football teams, SEC schools saw one act of integration as going against "the mission of the southern university – to promote and preserve the prerogatives of white privilege" (Baker 17). One act of integration would open the flood gates and be another instance of the pillars of white supremacy being torn down.

Integration was an intense debate throughout the South between political leaders, southern conservative whites, and southern blacks. Surprisingly, opinions varied among administrators and coaches for SEC teams, but for many as well as the fans, integration on the football team and in the university classroom was just another instance of the North enacting its will on the South. Despite having newfound success in football, the South was still criticized for its lack of integration by the North. That said, some scholars such as Samuel Zebulon Baker maintain that the North used "token integration of their football programs" as a way to separate themselves from the segregationist South (Baker 104). Northern teams' integration was not used to advance American society socially and morally but rather to separate the North from the image of the racist, white southerner. Although the South felt victimized and stereotyped by the North, the Northern teams did not represent some moral high ground. Still, that did not stop the onslaught of criticism. In one instance, Mississippi State refused to play against an integrated Nevada team unless they left their lone black player at home. Despite a lack of victory on the field, "Mississippi State officials reveled in a moral victory for the cause of segregation as

Nevada's outright rejection of their demands signaled an irretrievable loss of their power to exert their will upon starting lineups." Dick Friendlich of the *San Francisco Chronicle* was quoted for exclaiming, "Let 'em play in their own Bigotry Conference" (qtd. in Baker 108). Of course, the South did not see itself as a place filled with bigots. One Florida Gator fan said that "the U.S. Supreme Court has made a vicious decision against the South and we should show them that they cannot rule our Southeastern Conference" (qtd. in Baker 89). For some in the South, this was not about racism or bigotry but rather control. The same theme of the South battling against Northern aggression continued to play onto the football field.

Struggles of Integration

Integration on the football field was seen as the first misstep of a slippery slope to public integration. Though schedules were regionally-centered because of talent in the first quarter of the twentieth century, schedules were still regionally-centered in the mid-twentieth century because of the questions surrounding integration and segregation. Schools in the SEC "ensured that the only athletes their teams ever encountered were other white boys" (Baker 94). According to Baker, "institutional autonomy readily succumbed to the vicissitudes of popular outrage" (Baker 109). This was certainly the case when Bear Bryant attempted to recruit black players to Alabama during his tenure as Head Football Coach in the 1950s and 60s, yet this was not the case when Georgia Tech students protested over Governor Marvin Griffin's disallowing Tech to play against an integrated Pittsburgh Panthers team in the 1956 Sugar Bowl. (Both of these occurrences will be discussed in more detail later). Yet, both occurrences were influenced by public opinion. At this point in college athletics history, college football teams were not funded by massive television broadcast contracts like today; instead, "gate receipts were the principal revenue stream" (Baker 116). Some southern leaders were not opposed to integration,

surprisingly. University of Georgia's president from 1950 to 1967, O.C. Aderhold, noted how a decrease in game attendance would be detrimental to game attendance, so naturally, the universities of the SEC did not risk jeopardizing their primary source of athletic funding – ticket revenue – because of the decision to allow one or two black players on to the football team (Baker 116). Still, the implication is that Aderhold would have integrated the team if the fan's allowed it. Southern leaders in the state government did their part in ensuring integration on the football field would never occur as well. One bill that was struck down in Mississippi proposed that any official at Mississippi or Mississippi State who "knowingly arrange[ed] an athletic contest in which black players were expected to participate" would be fined and sent to prison (Baker 122). The state of Louisiana was successful where Mississippi was not in passing a bill that prohibited all integrated activities, any type of social gathering such as athletic events or even dating (Baker 122). Yet, LSU President Troy Middleton would argue against the bill because LSU had a responsibility for the public interest to play major intercollegiate athletic events against all opponents, even those from other states and regions (Baker 122). In a way, Middleton showed how ironic and contradictory SEC football became. If they wanted to assert that they were the best and that these teams exuded southern excellence, why not play all teams? According to Baker, "The Deep South Five" – Alabama, Auburn, LSU, Mississippi, and Mississippi State – were usually the staunchest opponents against playing integrated teams (Baker 94). Despite being a part of that group, LSU was beginning to see how playing interregional contests was beneficial to the school and the athletics program. Even then, playing against integrated teams did not necessarily mean their team had to be integrated as well, and schools like LSU and others were learning that improved competition led to more dollars in their pockets.

In the minds of SEC leaders, segregation was beginning to take a back seat to money and competition in the mid-twentieth century. In 1958, the Kentucky Wildcats played the University of Hawaii. The game had an insignificant outcome, but there was a noticeable shift that occurred at Kentucky because of the game. Kentucky's game against Hawaii "was the first time a SEC member had gone ahead with a home game against an integrated opponent," and it was clear that "discrimination wasn't the organizing principle of Kentucky's schedules: competition was" (Baker 135). Throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s, the subject of integration on the football field and in the public was putting more and more pressure on the schools of the SEC. Teams like Kentucky were becoming open to not only playing integrated teams but fielding one of its own as well. The Deep South Five was feeling the most pressure of all the teams in the SEC. The staunchest supporters of segregation on and off the field, the Deep South Five were risking a breakdown of the SEC, which would leave them alone amongst the rest of the college football world to play against themselves because they only wanted to play white-only teams (Baker 150). The teams of the SEC were at a self-destructive impasse, as some teams wanted to integrate and others did not. Sure, southern teams could battle for regional pride against each other, "but games against popular teams from outside the South truly solidified the school's reputation and brought pride to a state otherwise bemoaned in the national press" (Demas 81). The South saw this at work with Alabama's Rose Bowl victories against teams from outside of the South in the 1920s, but ironically, teams like Alabama and the rest of the Deep South Five were too focused on having segregated teams and games to realize what those wins had done for the schools and the region.

The Ramblin' Wreck of Football Segregation

One of the most unusual events in SEC football history was in regards to the 1956 Sugar Bowl game between the Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets and the Pittsburgh Panthers. Coming off of an incredible season, Georgia Tech was excited to accept an invitation to play in one of the most prestigious bowl games in the country – the Sugar Bowl in New Orleans, LA (Martin 552). After legendary Head Coach Bobby Dodd consulted with Georgia Governor Marvin Griffin, Georgia Tech accepted the Sugar Bowl's offer to play in the game against Pitt – a team with only one black player. With this news, pro-segregationists cried out in protest, and Governor Griffin – a politician who ran on a platform of opposition toward public school integration – reversed his decision and refused to allow Tech to play in the game (Martin 553-554). Griffin's reasoning was that allowing a great southern institution like Georgia Tech to play against an integrated team from the North was threatening the "southern way of life" (Martin 553-54). In Griffin's words, "We cannot make the slightest concession to the enemy in this dark and lamentable hour of struggle. There is no more difference in compromising the integrity of race on the playing field than in doing so in the classroom. One break in the dike and the relentless seas will rush in and destroy us" (qt. in Martin 553-54). Griffin's words provide further evidence that segregation became one of the pillars of southern society in the twentieth century. Griffin and others like him saw one small act of integration in a football game as being the first step toward total integration in southern society.

What made this event unusual were the protests that erupted in response to Griffin's decision. Students from Georgia Tech, Georgia, and other schools across the country came out against Governor Griffin (Martin 553-54). Students hung Griffin in effigy, marched on the State Capitol, and some even marched on his house (Martin 553-54). At the University of Georgia in

Athens, students marched through the streets, “displaying a banner which read, ‘This time we’re for Tech’ ” – fascinating given the bitter rivalry between Tech and UGA (Martin 556). The decision by Griffin and the protests spread like wildfire in the national news, while Griffin was quickly becoming a hated figure in the public eye to both pro and anti-segregationists. Tech’s student newspaper, *The Technique*, said that Griffin made “the state ‘look like fools before the entire nation” (qtd. in Martin 556). The *Augusta Chronicle* criticized Griffin for fighting for segregation on such a “petty, picayune level” that would damage “the reputation of [the] two great state universities whose football teams [had] brought fame, and glory, and prestige to Georgia” (qtd. in Demas 96). Lane Demas points out that “one pro-segregationist assailed Griffin for ‘making us appear to be an ignorant bunch of louts and practically sub-human to the rest of the world’ ” (qtd. in Demas 95). Understandably in opposition, the Georgia Tech student government president said he and his fellow students “were ‘not against segregation but against political forces which are trying to prevent us from going to the Sugar Bowl’ ” (qt. in Martin 556). Griffin could not have made a worse mistake.

Griffin’s decision to not allow Tech to play revealed the splits and contradictions in southern white identity. Pro-segregationists throughout the South and the state of Georgia abhorred Griffin and his decision, citing him for the rest of the country now having reason to disrespect the South. Yet, this was ironic, given how these white southerners were still for segregation which was still considered barbaric by the rest of the country. It seems also that many Georgians considered UGA and Tech’s football teams to be great representations of the state. After all, Georgia Tech had an athletic program experiencing “unprecedented success, including the football team’s thirty-one-game winning streak. From 1951 to 1957, Georgia Tech was invited to six consecutive national bowl games and won them all” (Demas 81). Football was

clearly a way for the southern university to gain respect in the national, public sphere, but it was also acting as a way for integration to slowly take place despite the apathy of younger, southern white students like those at Tech and the complete rejection of older, southern whites like Governor Griffin. The southern leaders were right to be fearful that one step toward integration would start the downfall of segregation. While football was a vehicle for change, the younger generations did not see it that way. Tech students claimed this was not about segregation, and they truly believed this was the case. But that does not change the fact that this problem was centered on race. No matter how much they tried to say – or thought – that this was strictly about Griffin exerting too much governmental power on the public like the North did, "students and citizens around the country were articulating their visions of an integrated [or segregated] America" (Demas 74). Interestingly enough, the northern black press commended the students at Tech for taking a stand against segregation. Even though this was about race, the students did not think so; perhaps the location of the northern black press contributed to their lack of understanding regarding the students' intentions.

No matter how much segregationists and the students wanted to keep the situation surrounding the 1956 Sugar Bowl strictly about football, it would play an enormous role for integration in the South. Ironically, Griffin ended up being correct – only in that integration would occur. Governor Griffin "realized that the game's popularity – and the visibility of black athletes on the national stage – had reached a point where intercollegiate football damaged the fight to preserve his region's status quo" (Demas 74). Griffin's decision would be upended by the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia, and Tech was allowed to play the game against Pitt. The game turned out to be fruitful for Tech as it beat Pitt 7-0 in a fairly boring and low-scoring affair (Martin 557-58).

Multiple bills would be proposed within the next two years proposing that integrated athletic and social events should be prohibited in reaction to events such as Georgia Tech's debacle, yet they were continuously shot down. Public opinion continued to shift apathetically to instances of integrated play as those like "columnist Jim Minter of the *Atlanta Journal* promptly attacked the proposal[s], asserting that [they] would endanger the national prominence of the Georgia Tech and Georgia athletic programs" (Martin 560). Minter, specifically, thought that "intersectional matches against the top non-southern teams might become impossible to arrange . . . and the future status of the Southeastern Conference could be endangered" (qtd. in Martin 560). It was clear that a shift had occurred in southern thought – out with the old guard, and in with the new. The reputation and strength of the SEC was too precious to jeopardize in the name of segregation. Segregation was a pillar of southern, reactionary, white identity, but the SEC represented the region too well for it to die because of segregation. In the next twenty years, the southern teams of the SEC would realize that integration was necessary to continue its dominance of the sport. As Charles Martin writes, "the abandonment of the long-standing tradition of total athletic segregation represented an important break with tradition" (Martin 562). Of course, national and regional change was heavily influenced within the next fifteen years by changes in federal policy coming about from the Civil Rights Movement, but it is important to understand that football was reflecting the changing times and ways in the American South, while fans began to value their SEC and collegiate sports more than past foundations of southern and regional identity. Nonetheless, those teams remained bastions of southern white identity, but the SEC football team was serving as a vehicle toward modernity. The team would help knock down the pillars of segregation, no matter how enveloped the game was in southern white culture.

The 'Bear'

An important figure concerning race and the southern college football team was former Alabama Head Football Coach, Paul "Bear" Bryant. One of the most influential figures in SEC and collegiate football history, Bryant was the leader of some of the greatest Alabama teams, and more importantly, he was the leader of a team that most considered the embodiment of the South throughout the tumultuous 1960s and 70s. Alabama continued to have athletic success throughout the mid-twentieth century, and the narratives that came from 'Bama's Rose Bowl wins continued to shape both Alabama's and southerners' identities. Bryant's time at Alabama was amplified as well because of the societal change occurring in the South. The eyes of the nation were upon the South as stories like those of the Freedom Riders beaten by white mobs in Alabama perpetuated the North's idea of what the South represented (Roberts 67-68). Bryant and the Alabama Crimson Tide were caught in an identity crisis which had been occurring since the Colonial Era. The newspapers and television anchors painted the South as "a violent, benighted land, a place that time seemed to have forgotten and where 'strange fruit' hung like Spanish moss from trees" (Roberts 69). Yet, Alabama's fight song boasted that it was "Dixie's Football Pride," but what part of Dixie did the Crimson Tide represent (Roberts 143)? As Roberts asks, "Was it the symbol of a New South struggling with old traditions and attempting to maintain its regional personality? Or was it the emblem of white supremacy, segregation's last standing warriors on the field of battle" (Roberts 143)? Just as sports writers had championed Alabama as the symbol of Southern pride in a region still reeling from the effects of the Civil War in the 1920s and 30s, the Alabama Crimson Tide of Bryant's era in the 50s, 60s, and 70s reflected a South embattled over a progression toward modernity that was held back by southern white reactionaries.

Of course, Bryant had to somehow manage his team, while the school administration, fan base, and southern leaders tried to figure this identity crisis out. Bryant was not just a mere person for Alabamians but rather a symbol of hope. What Bryant represented to fans was largely created depending on what the fan wanted to see, and so many fans loved Bryant not only for his winning of championships but for what he represented to them. Bryant's stature was amplified not only by the civil unrest in southern society at the time, but also by the similar rise in public attention that Governor George Wallace received. Bryant and Wallace were alike in some regard – "both [were] white southerners educated at the University of Alabama, both commanding audiences where they spoke" (Roberts 218). Yet, they were very different in what they represented. As writer Howell Raines put, Bryant was the representation of Alabama's hopes and dreams (Roberts 220). He was leading young men on the field, and he was helping them receive college educations, which was something most Alabamians of older generations had never fathomed. Bryant was a rags-to-riches story, an Alabama man who had grown up poor and now carried himself with incredible professionalism and sportsmanship (Roberts 220). Bryant was a representation of the good Alabama had to offer, yet Governor Wallace was the embodiment of what the rest of the country saw in the state of Alabama and the American South. After losing out on the gubernatorial election in 1958 to John Patterson on the basis of segregation policy, Wallace came back with a vengeance and with much more reactionary views toward segregation. Similar to political events in 2016, Wallace found something lurking underneath the cultural surface "with his underdog sense of inferiority and pugnacious competitiveness" that appealed to southern and Alabamian identity while also taking a hardline stance on segregation (Roberts 221). Bryant represented a new and modern South, while Wallace represented the old.

In the summer of 1963, Wallace would take a literal and figurative stand against integration at the University of Alabama. While the football team had yet to be integrated, the effects of *Brown v. Board of Education* were finally being seen at Alabama. In the midst of the Civil Rights Movement, students Vivian Malone and James Hood marched onto campus to register for their classes at the school. Wallace was representing the Old South, fighting for the state's right to govern itself and keep segregation policy in place. But Wallace was unsuccessful. Despite reusing rhetoric from John C. Calhoun and Lost Cause mythology, Wallace stepped aside and Malone and Hood registered for classes at Alabama, becoming the first black students to attend the University of Alabama and making the school an integrated institution (Roberts 233-35).

While integration had finally occurred in 1963 with the help of the National Guard at Alabama, integration of black athletes throughout the entire SEC was a decade-long affair. The first black athletes of the SEC enrolled in the 1967-68 athletic seasons, and the University of Kentucky was the first in the SEC to offer a spot on the football team to a black athlete (Paul et. al. 287). Integration of SEC football teams would take place over the next five to six years – although, black football players comprised only between two and ten percent of their respective teams. There was progress, however, as there was linear growth in the number of black football players up to 1980 and beyond (Paul et. al. 290).

Despite having integrated as a school in 1963, the Alabama football team would not include its first black players until the 1971-72 season. Bryant worked for years to accomplish this. As the head football coach at Kentucky in 1947, Bryant was unsuccessful in integrating the Wildcats football team, and Bryant knew that with such visceral protests in the state of Alabama it was unlikely he would be able to integrate the Crimson Tide as well ("Death of Racial

Segregation" 64). However, it is important to note that "Bryant viewed race in the context of football" (Roberts 56). In other words, Bryant was colorblind – to a degree. He would send word of black players to integrated teams in the North such as Hugh Daugherty at Michigan State, and in exchange, he would be able to recruit white players from the North who fit well with his team (Roberts 56). Bryant's view was complex. By seeing race simply from the perspective of a football coach, he saw no problem in having black players on his football team. He also wanted to play against integrated teams from the North because, again, he was a football coach. Bryant wanted to win and prove that his teams were the best, but he was operating in a space where he could never integrate his teams without risk of losing his position. Bryant was never going to campaign against segregation alongside Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

But eventually, Bryant worked toward integrating the Alabama football team. Throughout the 1960s, Alabama accepted invitations to bowl games against integrated teams from other regions, which helped the Alabama fan base get somewhat used to the idea of playing integrated teams (*JBHE*, "Death of Racial Segregation" 64). It was also notable how Alabama continued to post unblemished records every season, but sportswriters were likely penalizing them in their votes of national champions for playing easier schedules against all-white teams (*JBHE*, "Death of Racial Segregation" 65). In Bryant's worst loss of his career against the University of Southern California (USC) Trojans, Bryant was able to beat the school officials of Alabama. Two black USC running backs rolled the Crimson Tide, and Bryant now had the fodder to integrate the Alabama football team. In 1971, John Mitchell became the first black football player at Alabama, and "two years later, one third of the starting Alabama lineup was black" (*JBHE*, "Death of Racial Segregation" 65). Toward the end of Bryant's career, Bryant joked, "Sam Cunningham [- one of the USC running backs -] did more for integration in

Alabama in 60 minutes than Martin Luther King Jr. did in 20 years" (qtd. in "Death of Racial Segregation" 65). Bryant showed how the game of football brought about change if one examined the world from only the perspective of football. In that way, the sport was democratic, and it was an equalizer of sorts. Bryant worked to integrate a symbol of southern white pride in the Alabama Crimson Tide. When that symbol's dominance and power against other regions was in jeopardy because of its stance on segregation and integration in collegiate sports, Bryant showed how the state of Alabama and the South must adapt to the changing times if the football team was to remain competitive and be a winning representation of the South on a national scale. Instead of being that symbol of Confederate and southern white pride, Alabama's loss was humiliating like the Confederacy's loss against the North. Unlike in 1926, the Crimson Tide was not fulfilling the myths of the Lost Cause, but rather the Tide were bringing about the truths of what happened in and after the Civil War. To compete, the Tide had to adapt to modernity.

The SEC would finally integrate its football teams in the 1970s, and the South was, again, reeling from a time of change. Throughout the first three quarters of the twentieth century, football in the South and the SEC served many different purposes, and it reflected the changing times of southern culture and southern identity. Initially brought to the South by southern progressive leaders, football was a way to uplift the South past the expectations of the rest of America. Yet, to achieve popularity among southern whites, football was imbued with the rhetoric and imagery of Lost Cause mythology and Confederate iconography. The game began to reflect the self-contradictory nature of southern white identity, where questions arose of whether this was a newer and more civil white South still struggling with the past or if it was a dying generation of the white South that was still holding onto the powers that came with segregation. SEC football served as a way for southern whites to beat the rest of the nation at its own game.

As exemplified by Alabama's Rose Bowl win, it was a cathartic experience that allowed them to finally triumph over the stereotypes from other Americans. Yet, when the rest of the nation continued to progress socially in the 1960s, the teams of the SEC continued to stay put in time, eventually feeling the pressure of integration after repeatedly losing out on titles and games due to hardline stances against integration on the football field. The SEC football team is a vehicle toward modernity as it helped knock down pillars of segregation because of southern whites' need to be the best at the game. But it has continued to be enveloped in southern white identity, continuing to grow and become a more powerful conference in college football. The conference is still a representation of the region, yet the issue of race is still sitting by the door and waiting to be addressed as tens of thousands of white fans cheer on black players on the field.

Chapter 3 – Black Athletes in the System of College Football

College football fans are able to connect to one another better than ever, whether through text, sports news, or social media. Through online forums such as the subreddit, r/CFB, on Reddit.com, fans can post content, questions, and links focusing only on college football. During the middle of the 2016 college football season, one subscriber asked, "What type of football defines each conference?" So for example, the Big Ten could be characterized as having a power-running-style that adapts to the harsh winters of the northeastern United States during the football season. Or the Pac-12, comprised of teams with less-traditional success on the West Coast trying to establish a brand, is flashy with dazzling offenses and fast touchdowns. The topic was the same as many others where fans simply wanted to discuss college football with an air of lightness and frivolity. The top answer to this question took a different turn than the usual college football-themed joke with a user stating that "the SEC is a bunch of kids trying to escape the poverty of the south by risking it all on every play for a shot at the NFL" – to which another

user replied, “I came here for the memes not to read some heavy shit man,” almost implying that everyone knew this but no one wanted to say it (Reddit.com). How some responded internally probably depended on their context. But no matter, the answer’s response indicated that views surrounding the South had not really changed as much as those southern progressive leaders of the past had hoped football would influence. And perhaps no matter how much football was intended to be used as a symbol of modernity by southern progressive leaders, the SEC and southern football were still reflecting what the South was – a poverty-stricken place where young black men saw football and athletics as a way out and where whites exploit their labor and talents.

Other writers and sports pundits have commented on the South in a similar manner with cutting and snarky jabs. In his book *Better Off Without ‘Em: A Northern Manifesto for Southern Secession*, author Chuck Thompson makes a sarcastic case that the South should secede again because the region brings the rest of the country down. In the book, he quotes Spencer Hall, a college football beat writer, who says, “The South is good at football for the same reason Brazil is good at soccer; there’s a large underclass of blacks and whites who see sports as a way out [. . .] I’m not a big fan of economic determinism, but we’ve got a huge, impoverished African American population” (qtd. in C. Thompson 129). Perhaps Hall sees the South as an impoverished region that is so uneducated that its residents must strive to make it to the professional ranks. Thompson also includes sports pundit Colin Cowherd. Known for his outlandish and brash claims, Cowherd says that the SEC is good at football because of a lack of education: Southerners “create enormous football players what with the unhealthy lifestyles and unhealthy eating habits,” and no other American group “creates as many gigantic, 340-pound seventeen-year-olds” (qtd. in C. Thompson 130). Cowherd reduces the South’s obsession and

passion for football to be a question of education and ignorance. There are many reasons why southerners enjoy football, so Cowherd is incorrectly generalizing about the entire region. According to Cowherd, southerners do not see sports as a way out because of being poor but rather because they are so ignorant and uneducated that they cannot do anything else. Thompson ponders on his own thoughts:

> Might the importance of college football in the South have anything at all to do with the fact that it is an insanely lucrative enterprise based upon free labor supplied predominantly by young black men and poor whites? Even unintentionally, can the fervor for college football be explained by a subliminal desire to affirm the peculiar institution through which the South rose to its apex in the same way of the lovingly restored mansions of the cotton barons of Natchez, Mississippi? (C. Thompson 148-9)

And while Thompson is writing as a satirist who "wants" the South to secede from the rest of the U.S., he raises an important question. Does the South love college football because of its seeming similarity to the old systems of chattel slavery and sharecropping? One can make an argument for the similarities and parallelism of college football (and many other hierarchical American systems) to slave systems, but I see it as erroneous to go beyond the similarities and proclaim that it is a new system of slavery – an answer I will expand on later in conjunction with Billy Hawkins's piece *The New Plantation*. Despite how radical answers can be to that question, a more important question is, how do black football players and other black students feel about how they are treated at SEC schools and other institutions? The first question implies that black athletes do not have a choice. And while they do have a choice, we need to make sure that it is the best choice. Because of this, we must look to how we can improve college football, and that begins with addressing the needs of the players. In the past few years, a few examples arose in national news concerning black football players and race on their college campuses showing that

racism and prejudice on college campuses is common and that even star black athletes experience racism.

Black Football Players' Lack of Voice

In 2015, two events sparked national outcry over race and college football: a racist frat video at the University of Oklahoma and an Oklahoma player's reaction, and the Missouri University football players' protest against the public injustices made by the school. In the fraternity's video, white fraternity members chanted, "There will never be a n---er SAE [Sigma Alpha Epsilon], you can hang 'em from a tree but they'll never [inaudible] with me, there will never be a n---er SAE" ("Oklahoma SAE Frat"). After the video was posted on social media by fraternity members at the University of Oklahoma, Oklahoma linebacker, Eric Striker, posted a SnapChat that went viral, showcasing his disgust and frustration with fans. In a visceral reaction video, Striker exclaimed, "F—k all you b----es," in reference to the fraternity brothers. He went on to say that the "same mother-----s talking about how racism don't exist be the same mother-----s shaking our hands, giving us hugs, telling 'em how you really love us – f—k you phony-ass b----es" ("Eric Striker Rant"). While Striker's reaction was in response to the racist chants of white SAE members, he took it as an opportunity to call out all those who show football players love while they spout off racist comments behind the players' backs. Striker's message was clear: how dare you cheer for us, high five us, and hug us (football players) and then chant racist messages like this one. And Striker is completely justified and correct. Some white fans and students will openly cheer for black athletes, but when they are not in uniform, they are just black people to discriminate against and exploit in America.

Striker exposed this terrible irony, and he began a conversation. Auburn linebacker Kris Frost points to how much effort he and his teammates put into representing the university, "going

out there and playing, working out and practicing every day, and on Saturdays, the fans just see a helmet, they don't see a person under it" (qtd. in Aschoff and Rittenberg). Frost brings up a good point in that fans do not see the blood, sweat, tears, and work that go into producing the product fans see every Saturday. Fans can distance themselves, tuning into or attending the game on a whim. But for some of these players, the game is life, and not in the sense of just passion but in work as well. Perhaps even more important is to realize that fans can easily dehumanize football players. When dressed in full pads and helmet, football players are morphed into depersonalized gladiators. They are no longer people like you and me; they are dehumanized objects here for our entertainment. So when a player leaves the field, a fan who may already care little about black people feels no sense of responsibility to care about the player off the field. Other college football players have made claims similar to those of Striker and Frost. Former University of Florida Defensive Lineman Jonathan Bullard says, "Everybody loves you on game day. Everybody loves you after a win. . . . But behind closed doors, who are you, what are you?" Auburn cornerback Jonathan Jones asked, "If I wasn't playing football would they still want to hang around me? That always crosses your mind" (qtd. in Aschoff and Rittenberg). We find that players – especially black players – can find it easy to feel as if they do not have a voice. Many are coming from positions where football or basketball is the best, if not the only, way for them to make a living and advance in socio-economic status. On top of that, there are multiple points of pressure, such as the pressure to win, the pressure to play, the pressure to make it to the pros, the pressure from home, and the pressure from the fans. The pressure from fans can be some of the heaviest. It is extremely difficult for a black player in the South to voice his emotions, feelings, and opinions on race relations at his school when he plays for crowds comprised mostly of white fans every Saturday – no matter if they are prejudiced or not. And some of these fans

are fans who are apathetic about whether a black player feels included at the university or whether he feels comfortable playing under the Confederate flag. Because for fans, players are fleeting and they are there to represent an idea, university, and team entity that the fans have been cheering on for years. Fans have the ability to watch and expect their teams to win championships no matter who is on the field. In this system, the player does not matter after his time is done playing for the team. That is not to say, however, that this always happens and that a player always has a negative experience playing for the team.

Perhaps the most widely publicized and controversial event surrounding college athletes and race occurred in the fall of 2015 when the University of Missouri football team "announced that it would not play until [the university's president] left his position" (Bump). Protests began to increase after multiple "racist, sexist, [and] homophobic incidents" occurred with no response from the University of Missouri's administration. Not since 1969 had a team used its position like this – and those players were cut from their team.[5] Philip Bump, writing for the *Washington Post*, pointed out three reasons this team's protest was effective in getting former Missouri President Tim Wolfe to resign. First, the team was "the public face of the student body." Football players are, more often than not, the most public representations of their schools – a group who dons the school's colors and plays on national television almost every week. While the situation at Missouri had been publicized because of the hunger strike of one student in protest of Wolfe, it was the football players who used their public stature to advance the protest and take the news to the headlines of news outlets around the country. Unfortunately, the brave protests of one person on hunger strike and a few students were not able to bring national media attention to the

[5] In 1969, 14 black players were dismissed from the University of Wyoming football team for protesting their next opponent's (Brigham Young University) "barring [of] black men from the priesthood" by "wearing black armbands on their civilian clothes." (P. White)

protest. And arguably, one player would not have brought it either. But when a number of players stood up together, they used the strength of numbers and public stature to bring enough negative media attention to the University to force Wolfe to make a decision. The second reason, according to Bump, was that the team was able to leverage the "pressure of an immediate timeline." The next week, the Tigers were slated to play Brigham Young (BYU), which gave a deadline for the University to provide some sort of solution. The second reason worked in tandem with the third, in that if the team did not play, the "cancellation on the part of the Tigers would result in a $1 million fine to be paid to BYU," something that even the most profitable athletic departments in the country cannot afford (Bump).

This was a moment when college athletes, and even more specifically, college football players, were able to see the power they had when they came together as a team. While some players, such as Auburn Linebacker Frost and Cornerback Jones, point out the inability to voice their concerns, the Mizzou football team proved that with strength in numbers, "they are no longer nameless figures in video games from which they don't profit. . . . They have more ways than ever before to spread their message. And they are becoming increasingly aware of their power, especially when it comes to issues of race" (Post-Dispatch). These players risked their scholarships and the chance to make it to the NFL one day to stand up for what they understood was right. Fortunately, their position was bolstered by their head coach – a person who made more money than the president of the school – who stood in solidarity with his players. The Missouri team had a perfect scenario to protest and get what they and the rest of Mizzou's black community wanted, yet that is probably not always the case. If players came together to protest at a high-profile football program such as Alabama or Ohio State, it is difficult to conceive of what would happen. More than likely schools like these two and SEC institutions like Florida,

Georgia, LSU, and Tennessee are in pursuit of a national championship. Players would have a tough decision to make: give up the chance to become an all-time great or protest? The players would still have the power in this situation, however. Head Football Coach Nick Saban of Alabama would be left to play his second and third-stringers if his starting lineup decided to protest and sit out games, effectively ending the Crimson Tide's chances of winning a national championship for that year. Whether those players would be able to keep their scholarships is a whole different story, and as we will see at Missouri, the school suffered at the hands of southern white fans.

College football players are in a unique position, however, which other protestors in public discourse on race rarely find themselves – whether or not the players play can cause financial ruin in college athletics. While players have their scholarships to lose, the schools and cable networks can lose millions. If the Mizzou players did not play against BYU, the school would have lost money from the game contract. If the players had protested longer and forfeited multiple games, the team would have lost out on other potential revenue guarantees. And without at least six wins, the Missouri Tigers would have been ineligible for bowl games, meaning that the school would miss out on a hefty bowl payout. Of course, that also means people like the coaches and administrators would miss out on contractual bonuses as well. If games against conference opponents were missed, the school could lose money that is distributed to the teams within the conference. Given that Missouri is part of the SEC, it earns "$15.6 million per year just to be seen on the SEC Network on cable" – one of the largest per school distributions of cable network money out of all the conferences (Bump). The school would also miss out on the brand recognition that comes with playing on a national television, which means missing out on potential new students. Also, Missouri donors initially became upset and frustrated by the

negative publicity that came with the protest. To exert their displeasure with the athletics program, they retracted their donations from the school. In December of 2015, the year of the protest, Missouri saw a $494,000 decrease in donations, “a 68.7 percent decline.” In the three months after that protest, “cash contributions to the athletic department were down 24.3 percent compared to [the] last year.” On the academic side, “new pledges and donations overall fell $6 million in December, usually one of the biggest months because donors are planning their tax deductions” (Keller and Walljasper). In an unlikely turn of events, Missouri would end up posting $171 million in donations for that fiscal year – a school record (Pboggs). Perhaps new marketing efforts helped them recover from the hit of the protest, and perhaps the negative publicity sparked alumni to donate more, feeling that their alma mater needed the help. While difficult to infer how they posted a record-setting year, the results of the protest likely contributed to down numbers in the following months. The school stands to lose money if its student athletes protest.

And let us not forget about the real money-maker here: ESPN and any other cable network that broadcasts collegiate athletics. If athletes refuse to play, networks would miss out on games to broadcast, which means that advertisers would ask for refunds on the millions of dollars spent on marketing and television commercials. The cable networks would be left to figure out what else to broadcast, and the advertisers would simply find another way to reach their target markets, which by the way, is very difficult to do because college football is one of the few gateways to many different male-centric demographics in America. Clearly, athletes drive college athletics. But all those parties involved in the production of collegiate athletics are *supposed* to be incentivized to show up to the game and provide a product, by demand, for the fans to watch. And in theory, all parties are incentivized to provide this product. The schools and

cable networks make money, and players are given a mostly, if not completely, free education along with certain services, privileges, networks, and opportunities other students do not receive. But through a theory of labor argument, the players have the power, and if they feel as if they are not provided fair and equitable treatment for their services to the school, they can clog and dismantle intercollegiate sports. In this regard, the schools of the SEC and others must be attentive to public discourse on race in the South and at their universities. College football is so engrained in the southern white identity that the fans will always bring the demand, but fielding teams comprised mostly of black players requires that the school always be attentive to how black players feel at their institution. Put into an already precarious and pressured position, college athletes – and thus black athletes – must be the top priorities of SEC schools, which means that those schools should be on the forefront of progress surrounding race in the South. But as we learned through the Missouri case and the quotes of the players previously mentioned, that is not always the case.

A Colonial Model?

One faculty member at the University of Georgia has gone as far as to say that the predominantly white institutions (PWIs) of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) modeled the collegiate athletics system on the system of slavery in the Old South. Like Thompson's point from earlier, the black athlete is then considered a modern slave performing free labor for white masters. Billy Hawkins argues "that the playing fields and arenas at these institutions have replaced the cotton and tobacco fields that [black athletes'] ancestors toiled in from sun up to sun down" (*The New Plantation* 2). Hawkins claims that black athletes slave away on the fields and courts for white coaches and school administrators only for the black athlete to be left in the dust as a piece of property used for economic gain. A drastic and dark

image, Hawkins is not using hyperbole as a rhetorical device so much as arguing that black athletes *are* treated as slaves in a colonial model. Hawkins believes that the schools of the NCAA, and thus the SEC, are hidden behind a "veil of amateurism" that hides their corporate and professional nature (*The New Plantation* 3). Using the word "veil," Hawkins is likely referring to W.E.B Du Bois's theory of double-consciousness and the metaphorical veil that black people must navigate when with black and white people – an idea that black people must act and behave differently according to who is around you. Yet in this instance, Hawkins uses the concept of the metaphorical veil in regards to the school. Hawkins thinks that the schools must navigate through a veil, simultaneously generating revenue and profit while acting as if they are doing it for the student-athlete's interests. Hawkins believes that colleges are entirely profit-driven, and that there is no interest in the student-athlete. Because of profit-driven motives, they leave black athletes behind in their academic and professional progress while focusing totally on their physical and athletic performance before scrapping them to the wayside after four years of service.

Hawkins lays out the colonial framework and how it applies to intercollegiate athletics. The colonial structure consists of the colonizer (the schools of the NCAA and the SEC) and its relationship with the colonized (black athletes), where there is a relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed of "mutual dependence," and the colonizer enjoys illegitimate privileges based on the exploitation of the colonized (Hawkins, *The New Plantation* 61). In the case of collegiate athletics, the schools enjoy the revenue and profit generated from the talent and entertainment athletes provide. In this system, the schools become dependent on this talent, while the players become dependent on the school for resources stemming from their athletic scholarships. In Hawkins's words, they become economically dependent. Politically, the

colonizer has the power. In this relationship, the schools make the rules with little to no voice from the student-athletes. Racism is a key component as well as a way for the colonizer to "identify, control, and exploit" the colonized. Hawkins makes the case that black athletes at PWIs are singled out, easily identified, and susceptible to American racism. Finally, there are the social and cultural components; the social being that the "colonized are not a permanent resident" and the cultural being that "the colonized are removed from their cultural context" (Hawkins, *The New Plantation* 61). In other words, black athletes are discarded after four years of being a fish out of water. But underlying Hawkins's argument is the assumption that the schools are intentionally oppressing these black athletes. Hawkins considers the black student athlete and school's relationship to be a parasitic one akin to slavery, but we must note that black athletes make the choice to become student athletes, receiving benefits such as an education, room and board, and a valuable network of people. Rather than a parasitic relationship, I argue that a symbiotic relationship is more likely between the black student athlete and the school, where both parties offer resources and compensation to the other. That being said, just because athletes can make the choice does not mean that the system is not hegemonic. The system could easily be one where both sides feel they are doing the best thing, but college football and intercollegiate athletics are a hierarchical system and the players' selection of choices could easily be their only choices.

Published in 2001, Hawkins's *The New Plantation* uses statistics from a 1989 study of black athletes at different colleges from across the nation to reinforce his argument that intercollegiate athletics follows a colonial structure. A study from the American Institute for Research (AIR), found that 69% of black athletes surveyed who attended PWIs with 4% black enrollment or lower felt different from other students. 51% from that category felt a sense of

racial isolation, 50% felt a lack of control over their own life, 33% felt they had experienced racial discrimination, and 27% felt isolated from other students. Another category of black athletes attended PWIs with 4% black enrollment or higher, and this category's figures are not significantly different from schools with lower black enrollment (*The New Plantation* 69). Hawkins uses these statistics to provide evidence that colleges are 'colonizing' black athletes who are dependent on playing college athletics or reaching the professional ranks to advance socio-economically. But even at the time his argument was published, those statistics were twelve years old. While racism cannot be eliminated in that span of time, much can be done to improve the welfare of student athletes in collegiate athletics. Despite a lack of similar studies, there have been others with similar insights. In 2012, ESPN published a survey of black athletes who answered a variety of questions surrounding black figures in sports. One interesting question was, "Who is the most color-blind: Fans, coaches, owners or the media?" to which responses said fans were the most at 37.5 percent and coaches at 36.3 percent (ESPN The Magazine). One anonymous NBA player said, "Fans get a bum rap, because there's always one idiot in any crowd. But I've never felt like skin color mattered with fans. If you win and have your act together off the field, they love you" (qtd. in ESPN The Magazine). Yet, the last sentence of that comment is so important because it indicates that players must be successful in the eyes of fans for them to love them. While players like Brian Scalabrine, a white former NBA player who is known for being average and slow at best, are lauded as fan-favorites even though they are not successful, black players of the same or higher caliber do not see the same type of fandom.

Hawkins argues that colleges are targeting black athletes to play for their football and basketball teams. They then isolate the athletes so they focus exclusively on athletics, while the

rest of the student body views them as stereotypical black men who are only at the school for their physical prowess rather than intellectual ability. Isolation involves excluding the student athlete from the rest of the student population by providing separate cafeterias, separate dormitories, and requiring athletes to spend time either practicing or being tutored (*The New Plantation* 81). As cited earlier, numerous black student athletes have made similar claims of feeling isolated off the field in recent years such as Striker, Fox, and Bullard. Lastly, once the black athletes have been identified, controlled, and exploited throughout their four years at the institution, they are thrown away and left to fend for themselves without any preparation for the real world. Hawkins puts forth a good point here. While athletic scholarships cover most, if not all, expenses related to their education, how good of an education are athletes getting if they are not being prepared for life after college? It depends. In the case of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Hawkins's point is reinforced. In 2011, "an incoming freshman football player had been enrolled in an upper-level African studies class and received a high grade. That transcript ultimately exposed 18 years of fake classes," where athletes took these classes to get automatic A's and good GPAs (Kane). We can also look to other student athlete comments such as former Ohio State Quarterback Cardale Jones who said on his Twitter profile, "Why should we have to go to class if we came here to play FOOTBALL, we ain't come to play SCHOOL, classes are POINTLESS" (Jones). But then other athletes go on to take advantage of the free education afforded them. Take for instance former Florida State Safety Myron Rolle; Rolle was a frequent name on the All-American lists, but he bypassed the NFL to accept the Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford University. He went on to attend Florida State's College of Medicine, and he was just accepted to Harvard's neurosurgery residence program (Herbert). While the student athlete's education could be incredibly poor at the school, we must also account for the student-

athlete's choice in the matter. Those like Rolle show that athletes can excel both on the Division I football field and in the classroom, and perhaps, the education the student athlete is receiving is justified compensation.

Based on his argument, Hawkins would argue that the reason schools of the SEC and NCAA do not participate in public discourse on race is because they are driven by profit, and that profit is driven by fan demand. If fan demand wants to keep Confederate symbolism and anything else that can make players uncomfortable at the school, the school is more likely to listen to fan demand. Fan demand wants to keep things the way that they are, and it wants its teams to win. Fan demand wants its athletes to be athletes alone and nothing else. If a player(s) wants to stand up like Colin Kaepernick or the Missouri football team, fans make themselves heard by keeping money in their pockets. As noted earlier, Missouri saw a large decrease in donations in December 2015 – the year of the protest. The public backlash and attention from the protest combined with the poor record of the football team from that season – a measly 5 wins and 7 losses – likely contributed to this decrease in donor revenue at the end of the season. As we saw at Missouri, when players were not at the expectations of the fans, fans made the school suffer.

Hawkins's argument is a radical one. After all, he is arguing that intercollegiate athletics is a replacement of the antebellum system of slavery that plagued the United States for hundreds of years. And while there are surely similarities between the system of intercollegiate athletics and the system of slavery, there is one key difference based on the model that Hawkins uses alone – not including the wretched violence of slavery. Ultimately, black athletes still have a choice as to whether or not they want to participate in collegiate athletics unlike the slaves of the Old South. And in most cases, black athletes have choices as to where they can attend school and

play football, basketball, or any other sport. Now, Hawkins would argue – and he does in his newest edition of *The New Plantation* – that black athletes fall into an area of economic determinism that stems from the white supremacist power structure in American society. To Hawkins, black men must follow a path of becoming athletes, joining the military, or going to prison after entering criminal activity. In all three cases, black men are used as physical bodies for labor under white masters, he contends. Educational resources are too thin for black men to pursue anything else to make a living (Hawkins, "Introduction" 1-2). There are still some cases where black athletes are left with few, if not only one, options. For instance, a black college football player may receive scholarship offers from five schools: three are at schools with little to no prestige; one is at a school with instability at the head coaching position; and the last one is a school in the SEC that has had problems with race relations on campus. If you are that player and you want to someday make it to the professional ranks because you think it is your only option, you are going to pick the school from the SEC because of its conference prestige. This would be a case showing how college football can be a hegemonic system.

So while I disagree with Hawkins's absolutist argument, I think he still raises some incredibly important points that need to be addressed by Division I. For instance, in his updated edition, Hawkins points out that "50 percent of Black football players (Football Bowl Subdivision or BCS and Football Championship Subdivision schools combined) did not graduate in 2011, in which [. . .] 47.4 percent of football players at NCAA member institutions are Black" ("Introduction" 14). Black football players are not getting the education they should, and both the schools and the players are to blame. Are the players taking advantage of the opportunities presented before them, and are the schools effectively creating and communicating programs that help players fulfill their duties as both students and athletes? And even though the findings from

the AIR Report in 1989 can be considered outdated, we still see players like those cited earlier who feel as if they are outsiders at their universities. Too much emphasis is placed on winning by the universities' athletic departments, and not enough on the academic and career progress of the athletes of the school. This is not to say that there can be no emphasis placed on winning, but there can be too much compared to the emphasis on athletes' well-being. On top of this, as we have seen at schools like Missouri and Oklahoma, some black athletes are living in hostile and racist communities that are still expressing racist sentiments. And at some schools like Mississippi, fans are still celebrating antebellum and Confederate iconography. As a result, we are left with a system where black athletes can certainly feel isolated. The challenge for schools becomes achieving a balance between the demands and needs of the athletes and the demands and needs of the fans. To show those like Hawkins that this is not a system to capitalize off free black labor, colleges have to invest in the search for solutions to this problem. In the SEC, the college football teams serve a special role as representations of the region. Because of the power of representation SEC teams hold, this challenge becomes even more important to solve. While a solution would help the black football players of the SEC, a solution would also help the SEC institutions become leaders in the public discourse on race in the South.

Chapter 4 – The Rebels of Mississippi

"It sickens me when I see [a Confederate flag] on people's cars on campus […] It's almost like you might as well put a tag on the front of your car that says 'n-----.' That's really what it boils down to."

- C.J. Johnson, Former University of Mississippi Linebacker, Sept. 17, 2015 (Aschoff and Rittenberg)

The football teams of the SEC have represented southern white identity for fans throughout the region since the Alabama Crimson Tide took down the Washington Huskies in the famous and monumental 1926 Rose Bowl victory. Alabama and the rest of the SEC became projections of the Lost Cause mythology and Confederate symbolism that plagued southerners for many years. As success on the football field continued throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, the game increasingly became a part of both black and white southern identity and culture, and southerners used the game as a setting to celebrate other southern traditions and imagery such tailgating, southern hospitality, and an ethos akin to the small-town atmosphere. The game was no longer just a way to beat the North and solidify white, southern pride and security but rather a new social setting in the South where southern-ness was celebrated and revered. Akin to cultural water holes like the barbershop or the coffee cafe, college football Saturdays became a social setting for Southerners throughout the SEC.

The pinnacle of SEC culture is in Oxford, Mississippi, at the University of Mississippi (UM) – also known by many as "Ole Miss." Known for The Grove, a maple, oak, and magnolia-covered stretch of campus where tens of thousands of Ole Miss fans gather, eat, and drink on game days, a UM game is considered a bucket list item for many college football fans – even those from the North. Many UM fans proudly claim that no one knows how to party like they do; in other words, UM fans offer the quintessential tailgating experience. In an interview during the 2014 football season with *The New York Times*, Jane Foster – a Rebel fan – showcases her tailgate tent adorned with a mimosa fountain and a chocolate fondue bar. Foster describes how "southern hospitality is welcoming everybody, meeting new friends," and that she wants "everyone to be welcome." One couple of Ole Miss fans, Lamar and Jan Waddell, point out that they have people from all opposing teams in their tent, noting that four or five Alabama fans are

eating with them at that moment to prove the point. Lamar says, "Here, hospitality reigns" ("The Grove"). These fans proudly claim ownership of a sense and theme of southern hospitality and inclusiveness. To them, no matter any differences, all are welcome to their little corners of the South at The Grove in Oxford. Self-described as and given as a title by others, The Grove is considered the best tailgating scene in the country; thus, The Grove represents in many ways what tailgating in the South is all about. To fans, it is a place where all different kinds of people come together and proudly proclaim their southern-ness and affinities for their school, chanting the school fight chant,[6] displaying school pride, and excessively eating and drinking with good company. Yet, no matter how inclusive fans want it to be, the inclusiveness is exclusive for southern white fans. As Kiese Laymon noticed in his article, "How They Do in Oxford," "tens of thousands of young white folk are wearing white Polos (on White-Out Day), those Vineyard Vines club shorts, some brown cowboy boots and more long, flowing white dresses than I've ever seen in my life" (Laymon). On college game days, The Grove becomes a festival devoted to southern white culture. What is easily forgotten, or perhaps even purposefully ignored, in the pageantry and blur of cardinal red and royal blue is the history of The Grove and UM. Because while many southern white fans champion inclusiveness at The Grove, they are still flying Confederate battle flags and proudly displaying Colonel Reb at their tailgate tents – two incredibly divisive, rather than inclusive, symbols. Former UM history professor David Sansing is correct in that "Ole Miss is a microcosm of Mississippi [and] of the South" (Johnson). The school is a place where battles are fought over what it means to be southern and over what it means to be a part of UM. Intense battles have and are fought between empowered black students who want to feel a sense of ownership of their school and older alumni who hold the old

[6] The chant that many UM fans cheer before, during, and after the game with each other. "Are you ready? Hell Yeah! Damn Right! Hotty Toddy, Gosh Almighty, Who the Hell Are We? Hey! Flim Flam, Bim Bam Ole Miss By Damn!" It has no known origin or any true meaning except that it represents UM (Wray).

and divisive symbols and traditions that the school officially removed over the last twenty-five years close to their hearts. Administrators toe the line of wanting to appease alumni and raise revenue while addressing the needs of the students. And this all plays out in front of the eyes of the rest of the country, judging Ole Miss as a representation of the South with every controversy that arises. With its history of conflict over southern and University identity and tradition, the UM's campus becomes a place where campus, Mississippi, and southern identities are consistently subjected to the battles between groups of people over what it means to be a southerner and a part of the University of Mississippi.

While The Grove is known to be a joyous place where everyone should feel welcomed, it has not always been so hospitable. UM fan and former campaign manager for 2012 Republican Presidential nominee Mitt Romney, Stuart Stevens, notes in his 2015 memoir, *The Last Season*, the difficultly in believing that so much history had occurred in the 10-acre spot (Stevens 48). On September 30, 1962, James Meredith attempted to enroll as the first black student at the university in the Lyceum, one of the university's oldest buildings standing adjacent to The Grove. Escorted by twenty-four federal marshals, Meredith had entered his dormitory safe and sound right before a large riot began. Fiery Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett had seen a large hike in his approval after his defensive stance of segregation – much like that of Alabama's Governor George Wallace. At the UM game the night before Meredith's arrival, Barnett riled up thousands of Confederate battle flag-flying, Rebel fans at half time of the game, shouting, "I love Mississippi! I love her people! I love and respect her heritage!" ("September 29, 1962"). On the night of Meredith's arrival, Governor Barnett spoke to Mississippians on television asking for peaceful protest, but he continued to fight against President Kennedy and the federal government stating:

> Surrounded on all sides by the armed forces and oppressive power of the United States of America, my courage and my convictions do not waver. My heart still says, 'Never,' but my calm judgment abhors bloodshed that would follow […] Mississippi will continue to fight the Meredith case and all similar cases through the courts to restore the sovereignty of the state and constitutional government. (Cohodas 85)

Barnett was perpetuating the same story emanating from the southern states during and after the Civil War in that the South was under attack by the federal government, a symbolic North 101 years after the first shots were fired in the Civil War. Once again, the battle among politicians framed by Governor Barnett and southerners as one concerning states' rights and a limitation of federal government downplayed the fact that this was about oppressing a group of people. Yet, the rioters on that night showed the battle was about segregation just as the southern states had showed the Civil War was about slavery. This violence did not occur simply due to an issue of states' rights, but rather the entrance of a black man into what was understood to be an all-white institution. As rioters threw bricks and rocks and shot gunshots at Mississippi National Guardsmen and federal marshals, Kennedy addressed Mississippians, "'The eyes of the nation and all the world are upon you and upon all of us […] And the honor of your university – and your state – are in the balance'" (Cohodas 85). The rest of America gazed upon Oxford and watched in horror as reactionary rioters showed a willingness to go to war over keeping their South segregated. By the next day, two died with "166 marshals and 40 soldiers" among the injured (Cohodas 86).

Stevens points out in his memoir that the night of the riot – as he dubs the "Last Battle of the Civil War" – ran parallel to a hundred years earlier when students enlisted as soldiers for the Confederate States of America at the Lyceum, becoming known as the University Greys. The Lyceum had seen the injured before as a Confederate hospital, and

then on the night of Meredith's enrollment, there again lay "bandaged marshals [and troops] […] exhausted on the floor" (Stevens 48-50). Again, UM notched another moment of racism in American history. Despite numerous attempts, the University has never fully separated itself from Confederate and Old South symbolism because fans have been attached to them for so long. For much of UM's history, the student body and the University has relished that connection, and many still do.

Figure 3 - Colonel Rebel on the Cover of the 1947 *Ole Miss* Courtesy of: Digital Yearbook Collection, The University of Mississippi Libraries, The University of Mississippi.

As sports and football began to take off in the 1930s for UM, the students began to associate Confederate iconography with the school. In *The Mississippian*, the school's newspaper, the students selected a new team nickname in 1936 – The Rebels. In Nadine Cohodas's historiography, *The Band Played Dixie,* she writes that the nickname was chosen because it "was 'suggestive of a spirit native to the old south and particularly to Mississippi' " (Cohodas 161). Before, the team was known as "The Flood" – a nickname reminiscent of Alabama's Crimson Tide. Important to note is that "two of the other five final choices were [the] 'Stonewalls' and [the] Confederates" (Thornton 256). It seems safe to say that the students saw all of these nicknames to be fitting for the school they believed represented the antebellum South. According to Cobb's book *The Most Southern Place on Earth,* Mississippi was still entrenched in a sharecropping system where the disparity between wealthy, white planters and lowly, poor, black sharecroppers was stark.

One would think that New Deal policies from a centralized federal government during the Great Depression would have influenced this new name choice, but according to Cobb, "the Delta of 1940 was still clearly recognizable as the Delta" (*Most Southern Place* 197). The students likely chose the name because of how Alabama was imbued with Lost Cause mythology in the news media. Their football team was a representation of the South just like Alabama. With every team nickname comes a mascot, and Ole Miss fittingly chose Colonel Rebel in 1937 (as seen in Figure 3), "a southern gentleman in the image of a plantation master: flowing white hair, bushy mustache, wearing a long coat nipped at the waist, light pants, dark shoes, and a big broad-brimmed hat" (Cohodas 161). In 1948 and coinciding with the Dixiecrat Revolt mentioned earlier, two other Confederate symbols were added to the Confederate iconography associated with the school – the Confederate battle flag and the song "Dixie" (Cohodas 161). To add to the list of these four symbols, the uniforms the band wore consisted of "gray outfits and small-brimmed hats that evoked the dress of Confederate soldiers" (Cohodas 162).

While the flag, "Dixie," and Colonel Reb are no official symbols of the school, one symbol seen every Saturday UM plays sports on ESPN or CBS that most viewers do not know is related to the Old South – the term 'Ole Miss.' In the University's student handbook of 1948, we can find that the nickname for the school reaches all the way back to 1896 when students wanted a name for the yearbook. According to the description in the 1948 student handbook, "The name, [Ole Miss], suggests the ante-bellum darky who knew the wife of his owner by no other title than 'Ole Miss' and their mistress' daughter as 'Young Miss' " (qtd. in Thornton 255). Even in the nickname for the University that so many who went to the school hold dear, we find roots in racism and slavery. And even in

the nickname, we find the University becoming a trope figure of the southern plantation, reinforcing the idea that UM is a microcosm of the South and its celebration of antebellum history.

No matter where you look or what you read at UM, there is always a connection to the South, which raises some important questions: why did the University of Mississippi (and the state as well) become so entrenched in southern antebellum and Confederate iconography, how has it continued throughout the decades, and what does that say about the celebratory fans who continue to don and use these symbols while cheering for teams comprised mostly of black players? One possible and likely answer from Kevin Thornton is that 1948 served as the pivotal moment "with the concurrence of the giant flag, 'Dixie,' the university's centennial, and the Dixiecrats" (Thornton 259). There were "enormous social and economic changes to the South as well. The notion of a southern way of life was suddenly questionable," so it was not surprising that Rebel fans created "an outburst of symbolic defiance referring to a mythic view of a glorious regional past" (Thornton 259). UM and the football team were both a projection of southern white, conservative culture and a sign that the South was changing.

Memories of the Fan

These questions are difficult to answer – especially without the voices of fans who grew up going to Ole Miss games and cheering on the Red and Blue. In an insightful memoir, *The Last Season*, Stuart Stevens reveals the mind of an Ole Miss fan who has seen the development of the University's symbols over many decades. Importantly, Stevens gives a voice to the Ole Miss fan who feels attached to the Confederate and antebellum iconography but also very embattled over its implied meanings. No matter if

one agrees with him or not on different issues, we are at least able to understand why he has this attachment to the symbolism surrounding the University.

Stevens's personal story exemplifies the push and pull of what it means to be a member of that southern white, and importantly in his case, male culture. At one of the first home football game weekends of the 2013 season, Stevens and his father are wandering around campus as they reminisce on their days of attending games together. The pair stumbles upon the band practicing the "Ole Miss Alma Mater," which Stevens describes as "lyrical and elegiac, a song from my youth. It was an odd song to play at a football game, sad and haunting, but this is Mississippi, and anything that can evoke a sense of loss is powerful medicine" (Stevens 163). Stevens is right in that the theme of loss is an important theme to UM fans and even other SEC fans as a whole. To an outsider, it seems preposterous that southerners still hold on to this feeling of loss that came with the Civil War. The war was over a hundred and fifty years ago and it was fought over slavery. But as we have seen before and now again, almost every southern symbol and reaction is dipped in the powerful feeling of nostalgia and the fear of losing something – the Lost Cause Myth fully at play. For example, in one public opinion poll, results showed "significant majorities of African American Southerners interpret the Confederate battle flag as symbolic of racism and hatred, [but] similar majorities of white southerners commonly view the flag as symbolic of the heroic sacrifices of their ancestors during the Civil War" (Leib 303). Many white southerners have been taught that the Civil War was fought with valor and honor, and the battle flag is a physical memorial and testament to those who fought for something in which they believed. Yet the important component of race is left out in that interpretation.

On top of this, UM has a fascinating relationship with the concept of "tradition" – more so than any other school I have studied. In the 1959 "*M" Book,* the link between the present student and the past is solidified as one where the student continues a "living tradition" (Thornton 261). According to Thornton, students become crucial in the development of this tradition as if the weight of the University is placed on them to maintain "the connection with the past and the identity which results from this union" (Thornton 261). And the themes surrounding tradition, memory, and a link between the past and present are represented in so many parts of UM. Just by reading the lyrics of the 'Ole Miss Alma Mater,' you will find at least five references to loss, memory, loyalty, and a calling. Understandably so, these are all qualities of alma maters throughout the country, given that alumni likely feel loyal to their schools and nostalgic about their four years there. But we cannot deny the significance of "Ole Miss calling, calling, To our hearts fond memories" from "way down south in Mississippi, [the] spot that ever calls" ("Traditions").[7] We especially cannot deny it when the term, "Ole Miss," came from the moniker for the plantation's head mistress. Mississippi and the university are not simply calling on these fond memories. The Old South is pulling at the heart strings of southern nostalgia and the Lost Cause imagery surrounding the antebellum period.

[7] Lyrics of the University of Mississippi's Alma Mater:
"Way down south in Mississippi, There's a spot that ever calls
Where among the hills enfolded. Stand Old Alma Mater's Halls.
Where the trees lift high their branches, To the whisp'ring southern breeze.
There is Ole Miss calling, calling, To our hearts fond memories.
With united hearts we praise thee, All our loyalty is thine,
And we hail thee, Alma Mater, may thy light forever shine;
May it brighter grow and brighter, And with deep affection true,
Our thoughts shall ever cluster 'round thee, Dear Old Red and Blue.
My thy fame throughout the nation, Through thy sons and daughters grow,
May thy name forever waken, In our hearts a tender glow,
May thy counsel and thy spirit, Ever keep us one in this,
That our own shall be thine honor, Now and ever dear Ole Miss." (OleMissSports.com)

While the alma mater at UM is not known as a Confederate symbol, the song "Dixie" has been one of the key targets of criticism surrounding the University for decades. Stevens notes how he, like every other UM fan growing up, listened to and sang UM's band's rendition of "Dixie." Stevens compares the singing of the song by UM fans to "the singing of the national anthem," yet "it was [considered to be] the Ole Miss football anthem." In a particularly poignant comment, he also notes how so many different groups of sports fans call themselves "nation." Boston Red Sox fans call themselves the "Red Sox Nation," or New Orleans Saints fans call themselves the "Who Dat Nation." Even my hometown Florida Gators have referred to their alumni base as the "Gator Nation." But according to Stevens, all of those monikers are nothing compared to what "Dixie" represented for Ole Miss fans because that song "represented the lost glory of an actual nation." And of course at the finale of the song, the Ole Miss fans would let out a jubilant, "The South shall rise again!" (Stevens 164). Downplaying the fandom of other teams, Stevens claims UM has a special relationship with its fan base and the surrounding region. Stevens's comment implies that UM is a representation of the South; thus, the school and its sports teams – especially its football team – occupy a space of importance to fans that is not a simple fan-team relationship that can be shallow and fleeting. He argues that the University threads into the southern culture, and that being a fan of UM is wrapped into the fan's identity alongside the ancestral traits of his southern white ancestors before him.

It can be difficult to tell whether Stevens is putting forth his own views on the UM or not – again, engaging in that push and pull of southern white identity to become more modern or to celebrate the old traditions. Throughout the memoir, his tone is a

mixture of nostalgia and a belief that UM should continue to be better. Yet, he cannot detach himself from what he learned growing up in the South. He claims that the song, "Dixie," was probably doomed after Colonel Reb and the Confederate flags were removed in 2003 – most likely because of the ending chant. But, the song "Dixie" cannot be simplified to a simple title of being the "anthem of Ole Miss Football." Cohodas points out, "regardless of who had composed 'Dixie' or its first use (for a minstrel troupe), by the mid-twentieth century it was the anthem of the white South." White says in his work that "Ohioan Daniel Decatur Emmett (1815-1904) claimed authorship of the song," but recently, "scholars have challenged Emmett's authorship of 'Dixie' arguing that black performers taught him the song" (D. White 476). Nevertheless, Emmett performed the song as a minstrel song, demeaning the images of black people with blackface. Cohodas argues that "Dixie" is racist citing how the song was used by Dixiecrats and UM students as both had angrily and violently protested against James Meredith's enrollment at UM (Cohodas 162). But Stevens attempts to justify the song's use. Stevens argues that "the song was actually a favorite of Abraham Lincoln, who had it played at the announcement of Robert E. Lee's surrender" – as if just because the emancipator of slaves liked the song means it cannot be associated with white supremacy. Stevens tries to justify its usage with more poor reasoning by quoting his old friend – "a former McGovern worker who now gave large sums to the Democratic Party" – who says, "We might as well be the Syracuse of the South" in reference to Ole Miss's banishment of "Dixie" (Stevens 165). The term "Syracuse of the South" could mean a number of different things. Most likely is that the term is either a reference to how Syracuse used to be one of the great college football programs, or the reference is to how

poor the program is now. But no matter, Stevens erroneously argues that if a Democrat or a liberal voter thinks the song should be used, then the song cannot possibly be associated with racism and white supremacy.

Despite Stevens's flawed justification of "Dixie," his continued thoughts surrounding his memories associated with UM are fascinating and provide incredible depth and understanding as to why so many UM football fans feel the way they do about Confederate symbolism. While at a game with his father in 2013, the memories of going to games with his father in the 1960s come flooding back. He describes how "part of [him] would want the games to be as they had always been. [He] remembered too well that simple joy when the cheerleaders would throw bundles of Confederate flags into the stands to be passed around like muskets at dawn reveille" (Stevens 165). He goes on to say that "pure muscle memory" would have driven him to wave that Confederate flag vigorously with all of his fellow fans. All he wants is to go back to the simpler time with his father and shout, "The South shall rise again!," all while his father lifts him up into the air after a touchdown (Stevens 165-66). But Stevens conflates the bond of fandom between him and his father with Lost Cause mythology. Stevens became a fan after the Confederate flag had already been a staple of UM football, and he also grew up during the Civil Rights Movement. He does not view these symbols as racist and reactionary but as ones that are intimately tied to his identity as a UM fan and his relationship with his father. In this way, Stevens is an example of how symbols associated with a team can be conflated in a young fan, allowing for the symbol to be twisted into an entirely different meaning. That is the power of the SEC football team.

At this point in the memoir, it is clear that Stevens may not see these symbols as being representations of racism and white supremacy but rather as physical embodiments of childhood joys. Stevens, and likely many other fans like him, long to go back to the days when their fathers and mothers took them to college football games. Growing up going to Florida Gator games with my father, I understand that specific nuance of loss. The memories of going to those games are some of my favorite memories. But clearly Stevens, and many other fans like him, are not able to separate the nostalgia of those personal memories from the nostalgia of Confederate symbolism. It may also be that he cannot even recognize how tied together they are. He also does not acknowledge that his childhood memories are emboldened in a culture of white privilege, a culture where Stevens is allowed to remember celebrating a Confederate symbol and waving the Confederate flag as an innocent childhood memory associated with his favorite college football team and father rather than its representation of the Confederate South and its commitment to slavery. Stevens is an example of the cultural blindness that can occur with SEC football. As Laymon described earlier, the event is surrounded by whiteness and southern white culture. In the 1970s, John Egerton said that UM football games were a "'celebration of 'white supremacy, no longer regulated by law but by economics and custom and tradition: the overwhelming whiteness of the crowd, the teams, the coaches, the press, the referees, and the ancient gestures that evoke an unforgotten past'" (qtd. in Thornton 265). When an event becomes so uniform in race, it can be incredibly difficult to be able to look past at how a symbol you are celebrating can be wrong.

Stevens's thoughts and memoir provide a likely answer to why many UM fans feel a sense of loss surrounding their school and fail to understand why Confederate

symbolism should not be associated with the school. Not only were they not taught about the Civil War's causes and how the Confederacy was remembered by different groups, but these symbols also become entrenched into and intertwined with the personal and familial aspects of fans' lives. At UM and in the SEC, college football is a thread in the culture's fabric. Fans enjoy the experience of college football at the personal level. Just as Stevens argues earlier about UM being a representation of something bigger than a team, many fans throughout the SEC would similarly say that their teams are not just teams but part of their identity. Because of this idea, younger fans of UM can have difficulty separating their school from Confederate symbolism because that Confederate symbolism's relationship with the school and their personal memories is a part of their personal identity. Nonetheless, it remains problematic to celebrate these symbols because of their connection to familial and personal memories. As stated earlier, the Confederate flag is associated with the fight for slavery. "Dixie" is a minstrel song – a genre that perpetuated stereotypes of black people for decades. These are symbols used, or in association with, white power structures. These symbols further the racial hierarchy in America. To be a truly inclusive environment as Stevens and other UM fans profess, Confederate symbolism cannot be tied to UM or any other college football team.

In some of the most telling comments of the memoir, Stevens describes how as a child, he had always thought the song, "Dixie," had represented more than just loss but rather that the southern values and way of life were "superior to the crasser, mercantile ways of the North" (Stevens 166). As a grown man, he then realized the song was solely about loss. It was a way to celebrate what once was and to acknowledge the "loss and suffering" that came with losing the Civil War. He then proposes a definition of what it

means to be southern, which is "to know the world celebrated your defeat, and to join in that celebration was required to be accepted into the company of civilized men and women." While the North won the war and is free to never think about it again, Stevens says that the South will always be haunted by that defeat. The region must continue to live on and face the suffering that comes with the diminishment of a culture (Stevens 167).

Stevens exemplifies the push and pull of southern identity. As an UM fan, he wants to be part of a modern, American society. It seems that he wants an inclusive society, American South, and UM. Throughout his memoir, he discusses how his father raised him to be accepting and tolerant of others and open-minded. He lauds the accomplishments of civil rights leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. But much of his argument – along with that of other UM fans and southern whites – is problematic. It is understandable that he grew up never associating symbols like the Confederate battle flag or the song "Dixie" as being representative of racism and white supremacy because he and other fans were not taught that. For many UM fans, these symbols were representations of their fandom and their heritage. Not only did they feel as loyal to these symbols as someone would feel to the American flag, but they also felt extreme loyalty to the football team that was a vehicle to proclaim southern pride. However, it is important to note that not once does Stevens argue, or even mention a possibility, that Confederate symbolism is associated with the support of slavery. Notably, there is an air of victimization of himself and the South. It would be understandable to respect that feeling of loss and suffering if the South had fought because of a political disagreement over states' rights, with slavery, segregation, and the oppression of an entire group of people

being non-existent in a hypothetical context. But as history shows, slavery and oppression existed in the South and its violence and prejudice were very real. In its secession documents, the state of Mississippi clearly stated, "'Our position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery – the greatest material interest of the world […] There was no choice left us but submission to the mandates of abolition, or a dissolution of the Union, whose principles had been subverted to work out our ruin'" (Bonekemper 41-42). And that is why the South cannot claim these symbols are purely based on "heritage" unless they are willing to acknowledge that this heritage includes the horrors that came with slavery and segregation.

Rebellious Rebels

Just as other SEC teams were bastions of public memory throughout the American South, UM was as well, serving as a vehicle to keep Confederate symbolism and iconography in the collective culture of the South. Yet, the debates surrounding usage of Confederate symbols have continued throughout the last four decades. In the 1981 University of Mississippi yearbook, themes stemming from the Old South were still perpetuated. In regards to the UM football team, the yearbook stated, "The Glorious Cause was gallantly surrendered in 1865, but true Southern spirits rise today on a new battlefield. Rebel warriors again battle to overcome the enemy amid an excitement and pageantry that is uniquely Southern" (qtd. in Harris). A year earlier, the yearbook wrote, "Amidst a sea of Rebel flags waving to the strains of 'Dixie,' these Confederate Soldiers fight for the Gallant Cause. . . . The Soldiers know that the Cause is not Lost,' for each victory means 'the Confederate troops rise again" (qtd. in Cohodas 193-94). These images and messages equalizing the Southern football team with Confederate soldiers and heroes did not simply disappear when James Meredith enrolled at UM. Fans and students continued the

tradition set by southern media decades earlier with the 1926 Alabama Crimson Tide, associating their school with the Confederacy. Yet, as the years progressed, a number of events at the school continued to show how UM – an embodiment of the Old South – was still struggling internally with conflict surrounding race and Confederate symbolism.

Phrases and lines like these just quoted were a yearly occurrence in UM's yearbook, *Ole Miss*, but what was once something that faced rare contention at the University was now a point of debate and conflict between white students and the new group of black students who could and *wanted* to attend the University. Before the 1970s, there were some fans like Harless Moser who, in 1960, complained to Chancellor J.D. Williams about the usage of the Confederate flag, saying that the "flag was lowered, let us hope for ever, ninety four years ago," so let us keep it that way (Hoser). But nevertheless, usage of Confederate symbolism in those years did not face public criticism in the media. When white students called upon Lost Cause mythology in their words, they were calling upon something they believed in since "as soon as they were old enough to learn anything" (Cohodas 194). Like Stuart Stevens, the white students at Ole Miss felt that they were innocently professing their pride in their institution and the southern, antebellum culture it represented.

But now in the late 1970s and early 80s, "these same words rang hollow to black students confident of their right to be at Ole Miss but still uncomfortable with so many allusions to a past that for them meant slavery, [segregation], and second-class citizenship" (Cohodas 194). In one instance, tension escalated in 1979 when students wanted to provide a horse for Colonel Reb to ride triumphantly at the football games, which would be named "Traveller, in honor of Robert E. Lee's mount" (Cohodas 194). According to Thornton, there was also a "new giant rebel flag" like the one from the 1950s that had been purchased to use at the football games, but the flag

disappeared after the 1979 season (Thornton 265). After internal debate was about to tarnish the University's reputation again, Chancellor Porter Fortune sold the horse before the University could reach a tipping point (Cohodas 195). A quick and easy fix, this solution was more of a bandage across a bleeding and infected wound rather than an antibiotic. It was not a moment that would help repair race relations on campus any further, but perhaps at that point in time, it was all Fortune could do. Thornton posits that "the administration did not want to have to balance the wishes of alumni and students against a racist national image and bad publicity" (Thornton 265). The UM football team was not winning as much as it used to as well because "'rival recruiters from other schools . . . were telling the black players and their parents that Ole Miss was a slave factory'" (Thornton 265). Fortune and the administration had to figure out how to balance the "two opposing wishes of the alumni: fondness for the symbols and the desire for a winning football team" – two wishes that were clearly at odds with each other (Thornton 265).The moment regarding "Traveller" was one of the first events in a tumultuous few years at Ole Miss during the 70s and 80s, and it provided some foreshadowing of future administrative responses to public outcry over Confederate iconography.

The yearbook at Ole Miss was a prime source of contention among students and the public. In 1982, John Hall, the student editor of *Ole Miss*, inadvertently ignited a firestorm of protest and campus polarization. As editor, Hall was given a subset of the yearbook to write at his own discretion, which he took as an opportunity to highlight how the embattled nature of the year would help Ole Miss grow as an institution and community (Cohodas 212). Already in that academic year, the University had seen its first black member of the cheerleading squad – John Hawkins – refuse to wave the Confederate flag at football games, leading to public harassment from both students and alumni. His public refusal attracted the attention of Ku Klux Klan

members as well who held a rally in Oxford (Cohodas 199-203). 1982 also happened to be the twentieth anniversary of Meredith's entry into the University, a milestone that "had become a common benchmark for measuring how far the University had come on race" (Cohodas 204). Meredith's speech at the commemoration of this anniversary caused uproar from white students and alumni as he pointed to symbols like the flag, Colonel Rebel, and 'Dixie' as being just as bad as 'Whites Only' signs. Calling for these symbols' removal, Meredith's speech revealed the struggle surrounding them given the reaction of white students chanting one of the school fight chants, 'Hotty Toddy,' in reactionary protest (Cohodas 210). These symbols had become important icons for both sides of the conflict. The student's reaction of chanting the school's athletic fight chants reveals that symbols like the flag, Colonel Rebel, and 'Dixie' were not symbols of racism to them but symbols of their beloved school. Yet, those who agreed with Meredith interpreted these symbols very differently. But again, the power of SEC football fandom in southern culture presents itself. The white students' fandom is so strong that they are willing to interpret these symbols in a clouded way, leaving them in a state of denial over their attachment to tradition.

The yearbook came within the last month of the academic year, and with it, Hall's poor choices in his editorial spread. Choosing to highlight the tension at the school and show how it was progressing as an institution, Hall devoted a number of pages to the protests, including the Klan march protesting the addition of the school's first black cheerleader. While seemingly well-intentioned, Hall's words demonstrated the failed white perspective, stating, "'This has been a year of challenged traditions at Ole Miss….Students and alumni have been forced to forfeit a part of their culture in the name of harmony, progress, and compromise'" (qtd. in Cohodas 213). Hall's words put his white privilege and misinterpretation of the situation on full display.

Attempting to convey a message of unity through struggle, Hall's thoughts surrounding the University were clouded. Instead of trying to amend race relations on campus, Hall placed blame on the rest of the nation. In reference to Hawkins's decision not to wave the Confederate battle flag, Hall wrote that the "national news services…gave him tremendous coverage and Ole Miss found itself embroiled in angry controversy – a controversy magnified by the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* – places far removed from an otherwise calm campus" (*Ole Miss* (1983) 33). Hall downplayed the nature of the conflict – one that surrounded race relations on campus – and made it seem as if the North was invading the South again. From his perspective, race relations were doing just fine until someone else – like the media – came in and riled everyone up. Of course, it is easy to simply shift blame onto an outsider. That argument was common among those associated with the University. For example, the Associated Student Body President William Ray said, "There are black students at every school, why us? At every school in the SEC there has at one time or another been a first black cheerleader. Where was the press when it happened at those schools? We're the only ones who get coverage" (Finerty). It was an age-old complaint, and perhaps one in which people fully believed. The southern whites from the antebellum era had said that outsiders did not understand life on the plantation; it was not so bad for the slaves involved. Running parallel in history to this argument were the white students of UM. Perhaps they could see how poor race relations were and simply denied it, or they were so sunken into a state of privilege that they had no idea about how their fellow black students felt on campus.

A cartoon from the *Jackson-Clarion Ledger* that academic year, showcasing Colonel Reb chained to a ball adorned with the Confederate flag, exemplified Hall's words (Cohodas 201). The University was attached to its old traditions – its celebration of the Confederacy – but this

ball-and-chain halted any progress the school could make, leaving it behind other universities throughout the country. Tensions continued to rise throughout that school year as students organized protests on both sides of the conflict. Protests culminated with Hall's edition of *Ole Miss* at the end of the year, and his words seemed to push campus over the edge.

Left in a precarious and tough position, Chancellor Fortune publicly stated that the Confederate battle flag was not an official symbol associated with the University of Mississippi (Cohodas 217). In a monumental decision for the University, Chancellor "Fortune had officially disassociated the flag, once distributed by the University to students [at football games], from Ole Miss" (Harris).This fell twenty years after Meredith's entry into the school in a time when UM wanted to maintain a better image in the public. As exemplified by the cartoon and Chancellor Fortune's actions throughout his chancellorship, UM began to focus on damage control. Fortune described the school's relationship with the Confederate flag as a complicated one. He noted how "the coverage of racial violence by the national news media, and especially television, planted in the American mind the image of this flag at scenes of racial conflict." He continued with, "It seems self-evident to me that the integrity of this or any other great university, cannot rest upon the outcome of a public debate over the nuances of the symbols associated with that university" (Cohodas 216-17). Fortune and the University administration needed to stop the bleeding. They needed to disassociate the school from the rest of the nation's interpretation of the Confederate flag. Of course, framing it as he did, Fortune made sure to present the situation as one the University had never had control over but rather one that was imposed on them by outside forces. Regardless, it was the first step in a long succession of actions the University would take decades to disassociate itself from the celebrated memory of

the Confederacy. The microcosm of the SEC and the South was moving forward – painfully and slowly.

The debate over the Confederate battle flag and its association with UM picked up again in the 1990s, and Confederate symbolism continued to be at the forefront of UM's attention into the 2000s. Chancellor Robert Khayat was the leading figure, and he is known as the chancellor who worked toward the flag's removal from Vaught-Hemingway Stadium. A former UM football player and life-long professor and administrator at the school, Khayat was instrumental in helping the school become more inclusive and progressive. In his memoir, *The Education of a Lifetime*, Khayat delves into the behind-the-scenes of his administrative decisions. Khayat became chancellor knowing that he wanted to improve the state of the school. He felt that the school had never fully recovered from the riot over integration in 1962. Because of the school's negative reputation, the best professors refused to teach there and the best in-state students decided to go elsewhere. The result was a loss in tuition and funds for keeping the University well-maintained in its buildings, athletics, and student programs (Khayat 28). Khayat's goal for UM was for the school to become a representation of the state and the best it had to offer, "overcoming all the negative perceptions about" it – just like he had wanted to do as a football player for the Rebels in the 1950s (Khayat 39). Khayat was certainly inspired by his coach, Johnny Vaught, at Ole Miss, who had always said that Khayat and his teammates must represent the state in an exemplary fashion. Vaught would say, "'If you are champions…the state will be a champion. We owe it to ourselves and to the people of Mississippi to be the best we can possibly be. This team is the bright spot of our state – a state that is often maligned'" (Khayat 138). Vaught's comments demonstrate the feeling of victimization from the North in Mississippi. And

while this helped to inspire Khayat to lead the school and modernize it, perhaps Khayat was too focused on perception rather than doing the right thing.

The progress made during Khayat's tenure as chancellor partly stemmed from Khayat's wish for a celebration of inclusion and diversity, but it was mostly due to Khayat wanting the school to be perceived better by the public – much like Chancellor Fortune before him. Inclusion and diversity was a part of the plan to make the school appear to be one of the top higher educational institutions; however, that is not to say that Khayat did not care about students' needs and interests. It is also not to say that he was only providing short-term solutions. Khayat says he wanted to make this SEC school a place all people wanted to attend. Yet, Khayat points out his conversation with former football head coach Tommy Tuberville where Tuberville said, "We can't recruit against the Confederate flag" (Khayat 153). The official removal of the flag from the stadium seems to have been born out of a need for good football players rather than the student protests. Despite removing the symbol because it affected football recruiting, the school would become more inclusive simply because the symbol was gone. A new generation of fans could grow and become accustomed to a UM that did not associate itself with such a divisive symbol.

Khayat was blamed by fans and alumni when Confederate symbols were disassociated and removed. When news broke out that symbols like the flag and Colonel Reb were up for review in the late 1990s, southern white fans were in an uproar. Khayat received hate mail from across the country. When office associates opened the mail, authorities advised them to wear masks in case of an anthrax attack. Many of the letters focused on Khayat's "treasonous behavior and attempts to destroy the 'heritage' of the South. Others called him by phone and yelled, " 'You are destroying the university' " (Khayat 162-63). And Khayat himself sympathized and

empathized with these furious fans. He points to how he was "so accustomed to Old South songs and sights and symbols during sporting events that the origins of the emblems weren't carefully considered. Nor was the pain they caused others" (Khayat 163). Growing up as a UM fan, he became attached to these symbols because of his emotional attachment to the football team. And he thinks others did the same, which is why when he initiated the removal of these symbols, he thought that others "believed it was these memories he was trying to take away" (Khayat 164). The visceral reaction of the fans showed how deep the fandom of UM ran in the fan's blood. It shows how the symbols and traditions of UM were intricately intertwined with southern white fans' idea of what it meant to be a southerner who celebrated his or her heritage. And we must give Khayat credit for withstanding their pressure and removing symbols like the battle flag and Colonel Rebel from UM.

At the same time, Khayat was not consistent. In 2001, white fraternity members from Delta Signma Phi and Beta Theta Pi wore blackface during a Halloween party at Auburn University. Unlike what you would expect from some PWI, southern universities, Auburn "condemned the two fraternities and suspended them from campus," saying, "These images are shocking and outrageous, and they are unacceptable at Auburn" (qtd. in *JBHE*, "Better Race Relations" 22). When faced with the same issue, Khayat caved. A white student from Alpha Tau Omega fraternity "wore overalls and a straw hat and carried a pail filled with cotton" while wearing blackface at a Halloween party at UM. And to add to that, "another white student, dressed as a police officer, held a pistol to [the other student's] head" (*JBHE* , "Better Race Relations" 22). In a response unlike that of Auburn's, Khayat "refused to discipline the students, claiming, 'We have a serious First Amendment issue'" (qtd. in *JBHE,* "Better Race Relations" 22). Khayat failed to take action when a racist act had occurred. Because while he champions the

idea of inclusivity in his memoir, he was not consistent as chancellor, and to really say that he wanted a diverse and inclusive student body, he should have condemned, suspended, or removed the fraternity from UM's campus. What this also shows is that even with the Confederate flag removed from football games, a culture of white privilege still stood strongly on campus.

Khayat was not the saving grace of all UM's troubles, but he did contribute to the removal of many different Confederate symbols, including the Confederate flag, Colonel Rebel, and the song, "Dixie." His experience as chancellor shows how these symbols were never just simple symbols. The visceral and intense reaction from fans shows their deep attachment to the traditions of the school. It came from students and alumni alike. According to the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, "a telephone poll by the *Jackson Clarion-Ledger* found that 92 percent of respondents did not want Ole Miss to take any steps to change" when these symbols were first proposed for review in the 1990s (*JBHE* , "Ole Miss Refuses" 64). While telephone polls are not the best sources to generalize to an entire population, the massive support of those polled gives us an idea of what these symbols meant to the identity of fans in the region. In the 1994 edition of *Ole Miss,* the editor lauded what tradition meant at the University, writing, "Whatever the future of Ole Miss holds, we will undoubtedly be sure that visiting/tailgating in The Grove, dressing up for games, Rebel flag, 'Dixie,' 'Hotty Toddy,' Dixie Week and partying will follow Ole Miss into the future" (*Ole Miss* (1994) 5). As Thornton said, students were the living link between the past and the present, fulfilling a duty to uphold traditions. But as this editor says, upholding a southern white culture surrounding college football is now the tradition at UM. The intense reaction to symbol removal showed how the power of the SEC football team in southern culture and identity is so great that it can make people go to great lengths to defend their traditions. That power can make the worst come out in people. It is so great that it can cloud

people's understanding of a symbol, and it can change the meaning of it to millions of fans. And while the removal of a symbol can be considered a bandage to some, Khayat did show that removal is the first step in providing a remedy to the disease of racism. Because of how effective SEC football teams are in forming emotional attachments between fans and traditions, changing the meaning of a symbol like the Confederate flag, Colonel Rebel, or "Dixie" as UM has by disassociation is instrumental in the fight against racism.

Rebellious Backlash

At UM, many fans of today continue to posit the same types of arguments surrounding symbols from the Confederate battle flag to Colonel Reb and *Dixie*. One group of fans focuses primarily on the former mascot, Colonel Reb. Named the Colonel Reb Foundation (CRF), the group of UM fans has fought extensively through grassroots campaigns to bring back Colonel Reb as the school's mascot after it was removed by Khayat in 2003. On the CRF's "About Us" page, the CRF argues that "the Colonel is a loveable, unique, recognizable and historic tradition of Ole Miss. The Colonel loves nothing more than to bring smiles to kids [sic] faces, shake hands with alumni and cheer the Rebels to victory" (Colonelreb.org). The CRF paints Colonel Reb innocently and in a positive light. The CRF never mentions how Colonel Reb can represent a time period when black people were enslaved by white masters or a time when black men were gruesomely lynched after being falsely accused as rapists. The organization's description of him omits any notion that a symbol can have implied meaning behind it. The organization's argument harkens back to the idea that Colonel Reb is a mascot and nothing else. But this argument is flawed because of the way some fans fight so hard to keep the mascot who they see as a tradition and a symbol of Ole Miss. The symbolism of Colonel Reb cannot be reduced to just being a mascot when so many view him as a symbol of UM and its athletics – two things with which

those people support and maintain and emotional connection. If Colonel Reb or any other mascot in collegiate athletics was *just* a mascot, no one would have an issue with the mascot being changed. And in some cases, such as Colonel Reb, the mascot represents so much more than just a school. It can represent a region, a culture, and a history. Mascots are never just a mascot.

One of the most widely viewed videos the CRF has published showcases a new and unofficial Colonel Reb mascot walking through The Grove. In the video, the CRF members interview different people associated with the University and the foundation. One student says Colonel Reb is "his mascot and Colonel Reb will always be his mascot." In this case, the student creates a sense of personal ownership of Colonel Reb as if Colonel Reb is the representation of his school much like the U.S. President is the representation of the U.S. The CRF strategically uses different voices throughout the video. In one instance, the CRF interviews a former LSU Vice Chancellor, Rusty Jabour, on his thoughts surrounding the Colonel. Jabour notes that he and his dad have always known the "Ole Miss Colonel" as simply "what it is – just as a mascot." Another pair of college football fans from the northern U.S. taking in The Grove as part of a "bucket list" tour argues that Colonel Reb "is a tradition, and washing away a tradition like this one doesn't make any sense to them." Bringing in people not associated with the school is a clear strategy intended to show how it is not only UM fans who want Colonel Reb to be restored. A black UM fan is noted for saying that Colonel Reb "doesn't bother him at all" (*Colonel Reb Is My Mascot*). Besides this subtle jab against those who see Colonel Reb as a representation of antebellum slavery and racism, not one time are these representations addressed in the entire video. What is so ironic is how so many fans say, "It's just a mascot," subtly scoffing at any attempt to deem Colonel Reb as a depiction of a racist plantation owner from the antebellum South. Yet, tradition is the most quoted reason as to why some Ole Miss fans want Colonel Reb

to be the official mascot again. If he were *just* a mascot as so many say he is, why does this tradition matter so much? That is an example of how deeply engrained college football is in southern identity; it is the point at which fans cannot even see the irony in their own logic. Their interpretation of Colonel Reb is blinded by privilege and a uniform southern white culture surrounding UM games. They cannot see how the symbol can divide groups because they are surrounded by one group.

In an interview in 2013, Ole Miss Senior Adam Mead explains why he dresses up as the Colonel Reb mascot every Saturday for the CRF. Mead states, "To me, Colonel Reb is a Southern gentleman. You think about the Old South and Ole Miss, and he is the perfect mascot." Another fan who identifies as a CRF member discusses how there is more support for the Rebel Black Bear – Ole Miss's mascot replacement for Colonel Reb – than she thought, stating, "People have been rude and there have been remarks; I guess they support the Black Bear mascot, which is great, but I guess everyone has their own mascot" (*The Man behind Colonel Reb*). Of course, if everyone had their own mascot to represent the University, would it not be meaningless to even have a mascot in the first place? And some could be supporting the Black Bear mascot, but could it also be that those UM fans do not support the idea of their school and football team being associated with an antebellum planter and slave owner? It is shocking that so many fans are, for lack of a better word, clueless as to why there is protest and pushback against the use of Colonel Reb. But it is not as shocking when you realize how deeply interwoven the SEC school's football team is in southern white identity. Traditions that have been associated with a fan's entire fandom are going to blind them to the fact that others feel their tradition is celebratory of a racist past. It comes down to a denial of the historical meaning and interpretations surrounding these symbols. Fans can never argue that these symbols are only

representative of the tradition at UM when parallels are constantly being drawn by the very same fans about how Ole Miss is an embodiment of the Old South and southern culture.

New Beginnings

Time and time again, UM shows how it is a microcosm of the South as it battles with itself, taking steps forward and backward and experiencing that push and pull of southern identity between modernity and tradition. To this day, the battle continues. While much has been done, there is still more to do. Just in the past few years, controversy continues to arise as UM confiscates flags or refuses entrance with flags in possession (Harris). On top of that, there was significant backlash to the decision by the Athletic Department to discontinue the band's playing of a modified version of "Dixie." In 2014, "vandals hung a noose and an old version of a Georgia flag adorned with the Confederate emblem on the statue of [James] Meredith" (Mangan). Other events occurred as well such as "three members of the Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity [being] expelled from the campus chapter" for racist acts, and another student "pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor charge of threatening force to intimidate African-American students and employees" (Mangan). It takes a long time to change the culture, but changing the symbols is where we can start.

To so many fans, it is the end of an era. But in reality, it is the beginning of a new one. In a letter to UM and the public, current Chancellor Jeffrey S. Vitter describes how the University of Mississippi "continues to work on important goals related to history, context, and identity." Vitter points to the University's rewriting and contextualizing of the Confederate statue in the Lyceum Circle. It serves not to simply honor the memory of Confederate soldiers but also to "remind us that the defeat of the Confederacy actually meant freedom for millions of people . . . This historic statue is a reminder of the University's divisive past. Today, the University of

Mississippi draws from that past a continuing commitment to open its hallowed halls to all who seek truth, knowledge, and wisdom" (Vitter). Vitter declares that UM will continue to be known as 'Ole Miss' and that the 'Rebels' nickname will not go anywhere because he sees both as taking on new meaning in today's age. Yet, he qualifies this statement by proclaiming, "we must always use accompanying images and symbols that are consistent with the positive meanings we advocate" (Vitter). It is possible that Vitter is attempting to please everyone on both sides of this conflict, but it is a big step in the right direction for the University.

"We must remember that fans of Ole Miss boast about inclusiveness."

"We know how to party."

"This is how we do Southern hospitality."

"Everyone is welcome here."

The same three sentences are said in Tuscaloosa, Gainesville, Knoxville, Auburn, Athens, Nashville, Colombia, Starkville, Baton Rouge, and every other college town of the SEC. But how is your environment inclusive when players like former Ole Miss Linebacker C.J. Johnson are "sickened" by the Confederate flag? What about former Florida Defensive Linemen Jonathan Bullard pointing out that "'everybody loves you after you win. … But behind closed doors, who are you, what are you?'" (Aschoff and Rittenberg) How does it happen that when players exhibit free speech like they did at Missouri, fans are allowed to admonish them for not *just* playing football? How is your environment inclusive when you celebrate a symbol or an icon that is not beloved by the entire University and fan base – both black and white alike? That is not inclusive; far from it. So many consider the SEC football team to be a powerful force in Southern culture that brings people together from all walks of life to celebrate and cheer on a team to victory.

Theoretically, your race, political affiliation, religion, class, and gender should not matter because we are all part of one nation of fans. But ironically, the SEC football team can do just the opposite. It can be polarizing, and it can be exclusive. The SEC football team is a representation of southern white culture, and this phenomenon has occurred over decades with both deliberate imbuement and unintentional projection of southern white identity.

Epilogue

The SEC's new slogan is, "It just means more," and that is the precise message that the South has always conveyed. It is the idea that someone cannot really understand something until they have lived it.

"You cannot understand what this means to us."

"You cannot understand what my team represents to me."

"You cannot understand what my heritage means to me."

"You cannot understand what being a southerner truly means."

And while I think that there is some truth to these statements, it does not mean that you cannot be inclusive and progressive as well. If a fan is supporting his or her team on the field, he or she should be supporting the team off of it as well. For instance, I consider myself a die-hard Florida Gator fan. Come game day, no matter where I am, whether on the couch at home, grocery shopping, or physically at the game, I am wearing orange and blue from my hat all the way down to my shoes. It means more because I lived it. It means more because I grew up in it. It means more because my heroes were formed by it. And I also consider myself a Southerner, being the only one raised in the South in my family. But if I am going to support these players, I need to

support them off of the field and courts as well. They are human beings who are not simply there for the fan's enjoyment. They are playing because of their love for the game, because of the want or need for a college education, or because they want to play professionally one day. They are supposed to be as much of a student as they are an athlete. So when a student-athlete feels uncomfortable with the Confederate flag, or feels as if he or she is excluded on campus, all those involved in the process of creating the great event that is a game day in the South should take note. Finding remedies for the conflict will lead to progress in the South, and hopefully, in the entire country. The task of finding those remedies does not fall completely on the shoulders of the university administration either. The fans are just as, if not more, important in creating progress. Even if the administration takes away a Confederate flag from a program or a stadium, the fans must stop bringing them in the first place. The football teams of the SEC are bastions of public memory, and southern white identity is manifested in them. If we can use the teams for social progress in the South, we can help spread ideas of inclusivity and progress. And hopefully, we can take another step forward in creating a more inclusive American society.

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