The image shows a close-up of dry, cracked earth in shades of reddish-brown. The soil is heavily fissured with irregular cracks. In the bottom right corner, there is a small, sparse tuft of green grass with thin blades. The overall texture is rough and parched.

RACE, MEMORY,  
AND HISTORICAL  
RESPONSIBILITY:  
WHAT DO  
SOUTHERNERS  
DO WITH A  
DIFFICULT PAST?



Larry Griffin was born in Clarksdale, Mississippi, but lived in many places in the state—Winona, Greenville, Jackson, Canton, and Macon. His parents returned to the Delta in the early 1960s, and he graduated from Cleveland High School in 1965. He entered what was then Delta State College in the same year, graduating in 1969 with a degree in accounting. His most formative experience as an undergraduate occurred in his junior year, when he took an ethics course from William Pennington. In a very gentle but wholly compelling way, he later said, the instructor and the class led him to open his eyes, look around, and think about the world around him—Mississippi in the 1960s. He learned an immense amount in that class, but perhaps the most important was that college teaching itself is a profoundly moral act. Determined after that class to try to do for others what Bill Pennington had done for him, he set his sights on college teaching as a career, receiving the M.A. in sociology from Ole Miss in 1973 and a Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins University in 1977. He has since taught at Indiana University, the University of Minnesota, Vanderbilt University, Berea College, the College of William and Mary, and, since 2004, the University of North Carolina, where, as the John Shelton Reed Distinguished Professor, he now teaches courses on the American South, race and ethnic relations, and collective memory in the sociology, history, and American Studies departments.

# RACE, MEMORY, AND HISTORICAL RESPONSIBILITY: WHAT DO SOUTHERNERS DO WITH A DIFFICULT PAST?

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In his novel *Requiem for a Nun*, William Faulkner had one of his characters, Gavin Stevens, observe that “the past is never dead, it is not even past.”<sup>1</sup> The past, Faulkner seems to be saying, is recalcitrant, stubbornly refusing to go away or to be discarded. The past reminds—makes—us who we are and, sometimes, when we acknowledge that past, it also makes us wish we were not who we are. It fuels death and destruction, and it spurs acts of sacrifice and greatness. The past both illuminates the present, and, at the same moment, obscures it. The past renews, even, paradoxically, as it defies newness. In its inevitability, the past is always everywhere, persisting into the present and thus presaging the future.

Although the past is often coated with nostalgia’s soothing patina, but historical injustices, according to philosopher Janna Thompson, are especially likely to “cast a long shadow,” and that shadow is all too often anything but soothing.<sup>2</sup> And just as those dark moments of the past may license evil—think of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s—so, too, they may occasion serious collective, as well as personal, reflection about what happened “back then” and about the morality or immorality of those times and those actions. When the American South, for instance, was finally forced to abandon its long nightmare of white-on-black racial violence and state-mandated segregation in the mid- to late 1960s—the historical period historians call “Jim Crow”—the region resembled in important ways what are known as “transitional societies.” Examples of these countries are Argentina, Chile, South Africa, many other nations in Latin America and Africa, and just about all of the former Soviet-bloc nations in Eastern Europe, all of which traded dictatorial or authoritarian rule for some form of liberal democracy, however weakly democratic practice may have been institutionalized. The new regimes in such emerging democracies must confront difficult, sometimes exceedingly painful, pasts—pasts which, metaphorically at least, cry out for justice and redress, even retribution. Each of these “transitional societies” face at least two interdependent problems of what is called in legal scholarship and social science “transitional justice”: the first is how (if at all) to hold the old regime’s autocratic, often violence-laden leadership responsible for its wrongdoings while in power; and the second is how (if at all) to deal with the victims of the old regime. Transitional societies have

attempted to solve these challenges in a variety of ways, but the restorative mechanisms they have used to deal with both wrongdoers and victims can be grouped into four broad and non-exclusive types.<sup>3</sup>

First are the criminal trials of those who, by the standards of the new regime, committed crimes against persons. Restorative justice here thus takes the form of criminal justice—literally bringing the wrongdoers to the halls of justice.

Second are truth and reconciliation-type commissions, what I refer to later as TRCs, in which the victims of oppressive regimes tell their stories in public and wrongdoers’ confess their crimes, also in public and often in return for amnesty. Almost 40 nations have resorted to some form of TRC.

▼ SEE BELOW [figure 1]

The third form of restorative justice is reparations of some form, reparations being, literally, acts designed to “repair” the original, undamaged relationship between individuals and collectivities. Reparations run the gamut from apologies to the injured parties to monetary payments, health, education, and other social services to them, to memorials and other symbolic forms of historical reckoning and restoration. Both apologies and material reparations have been used by a large number of countries, including the U.S., specifically, to Japanese Americans for their internment during World War II.

▼ SEE BELOW [figure 2]

Finally, there are purges, whereby members of the old regime are fired from positions of authority and barred from further employment in certain jobs, or, similarly, their government pensions are voided, or, as was done in Brazil, they are subject to informal social ostracism after having been identified in a TRC-type setting. Some form of purge was especially prevalent in the 1990s in the former Soviet-bloc nations of Eastern Europe, such as Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

Now, with this in mind, I return to the American South, and especially to how it has or has not confronted its own “difficult” past. I stated earlier that the region, after 1965 or so, was akin to those newly democratizing, transitional societies about which we’ve been speaking.

How so? The first point of comparison was that until the mid- to late 1960s, when the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed and implemented, the region was not constituted to be, nor did it function

[▼ figure 1]

## Truth and Reconciliation Commissions

Uganda (1974 and 1986-1995)	Chad (1991-1992)	Honduras (1993)	Ghana (2002)
Paraguay (1976,2003)	Germany (1992-1994)	South Africa (1995-2000)	Morocco (2004)
Bolivia (1982-1984)	El Salvador (1992-1993)	Haiti (1995-1996)	Liberia (2005)
Argentina (1983-1984)	Rwanda (1992-1993)	Ecuador (1996-1997, 2007)	Burundi (1995-1996, 2007)
Uruguay (1985, 2000-2001)	Ethiopia (1993-2000)	Guatemala (1997-1999)	CaBada (2008)
Zimbabwe (1985)	Sri Lanka (1994-1997)	Nigeria (1999-2001)	Nepal (1990-1991)
Philippines (1986)	Panama (2001-2002)	Sierra Leone (2002)	Democratic Republic of Congo
Brazil (1986)	Yugoslavia (2001-2002)	East Timor (2002)	Grenada (2001)
Chile (1990-1991, 2003)	Indonesia (2004)	Peru (2000-2002)	South Korea (2000)

1. William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*. (Random House, 1951), p. 85.

2. Janna Thompson, *Taking Responsibility for the Past: Reparation and Historical Justice* (Polity Press, 2004), p. vii.

3. For more on transitional societies and transitional justice, see Thompson, above, Ruti G. Teitel, *Transitional Justice* (2000, Oxford University Press), Jon Elster, *Closing the Books: Transitional Justice in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), and Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History After Genocide and Mass Violence* (Beacon Press, 1998). Much of what I express here about transitional societies and transitional justice is indebted to these scholars.

as, a small “d” democracy: save for the Mountain South, the region was more-or-less a one-party state, with the party of white supremacy, the big “D” Democratic party, firmly ensconced in power. Moreover, more than half of its African American citizens were deliberately kept from the polls by preventing them from registering to vote. Indeed, in the summer of 1964, only a year before the passage of the Voting Rights Act, fewer than 6 percent of Mississippi’s blacks had been able to register to vote, the lowest percentage in the country, and only a fraction of those felt safe enough to actually vote. Another profoundly undemocratic element in the political culture of the South was that at least part of the region permitted neither freedom of assembly nor freedom of speech. Each of these three conditions severely weakened the representativeness of government and the machinery of democracy.

The second point of comparison between the region and the former autocratic and dictatorial transitional societies was the widespread, quite deliberate civil and human rights abuses—here in the South, mainly but not exclusively against the region’s African Americans. Segregation was the law of the land, and most southern whites, politicians and ordinary citizens, resisted any challenge to it.

Finally, we in the region were very much a people divided by race. I need only allude to the horrors of African American life in the segregated South, the daily humiliations and degradations and fear; the systematic, soul-numbing exclusions; the hint, or more than the hint, of violence to be unleashed at any time for any reason or for no reason at all. Unfortunately, death came all too frequently to the South: close to 4000, possibly as many as 5000, black folk were lynched by white mobs during the time of Jim Crow. So, again, we were, in the mid-1960s, a people divided, a quarter to a third or so the South’s own without much in the way of cultural legitimacy, physical security, or political voice.<sup>4</sup>

You can see, then, why the American South might well be considered—along with, say, Poland or South Africa—a transitional society in need of transitional justice.

On the other hand, however, the region was and remains unlike those transitional nations in crucial ways. First, and most obvious, the South, though perhaps a somewhat distinct culture organized around

its own norms and racial etiquette, was not a sovereign nation. Nor was it a unified political entity. The lack of sovereignty and unity both imposed real limits on the character and trajectory of what would happen after freedom came in the 1960s, but also gave the region, and the nation opportunities, for democratic change not available to most transitional societies.

The second difference, and the result of the constraints and opportunities inherent in the region’s lack of sovereignty, was that unlike the transformations that were experienced by most transitional societies, those that swept the South after 1965 were largely forced on the region from outside, from “America.” Yes, it is true that the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administrations would never have forced justice on the South had it not been for the struggles and sacrifices and successes of the Civil Rights Movement. But it was, ultimately, Washington that called the shots and compelled regional change.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps consequently, and this is the third difference, those who had once been powerless—black southerners—gained political power after 1965, specifically the ballot, but unlike the Solidarity dissidents in Poland or blacks in South Africa, African Americans did not assume, for the most part, formal positions of authority and power. Those positions remained in the hands of white southerners. African Americans also, of course, had little economic clout as well, and as a statistical minority in most regions of the South, they could not, except in a few places, hope to wield the ballot to displace the whites who had, in previous years, tormented them. But newly enfranchised African Americans did nonetheless alter the dynamics and semantics of politics in the region—race-baiting and the language of overt racism and white supremacy in political contests fairly quickly went by the wayside in what historian Hugh Graham called the “detoxification of southern politics.”<sup>6</sup>

So in a sense the South functioned, after 1965, in and as a new regime, but the promise of newness was distorted and partially defanged by the continuation in power of members of the old regime.

Forty or so years ago, these three conditions were sufficient to stifle completely any move toward transitional justice of the sort I’ve thus far discussed; toward, that is, finding some way to address and

[▼ figure 2]

## National Apologies

French president Jacques Chirac

- for the actions of the Vichy regime during WWII

Presidents Ronald Reagan and President George H.W. Bush

- For the internment of Japanese-Americans during WWII

President Bill Clinton

- for America’s violation of Hawaiian sovereignty
- to Ugandan school children for our role in the African slave trade
- and for the infamous Tuskegee experiment

Prime Minister Tony Blair

- for British policy during the Irish potato famine
- and for his country’s role in the international slave trade

The Canadian government

- to indigenous communities for policies aimed at destroying their cultures
- and to Chinese-Canadians for a racist immigration policy

Queen Elizabeth

- to the Maoris of New Zealand

The Japanese government

- for atrocities committed by the Japanese in Korea and China during WWII

The Australian Prime Minister

- to indigenous communities for policies aimed at destroying their cultures
- and for taking Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families

4. For fuller discussions of the Jim Crow period and why and how it was undemocratic, see V.O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (Knopf, 1949), and C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (Oxford University Press, 1974). On lynching, see Stewart Tolnay and E. M. Beck, *Festival of Violence: An Analysis of the Lynching of African-Americans in the American South, 1882-1930* (University of Illinois Press, 1995).

5. See Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*.

6. Hugh Davis Graham, “Since 1965: The South and Civil Rights.” Pp. 145-163 in Larry J Griffin and Don H. Doyle (eds.), *The South as an American Problem* (University of Georgia Press, 1995)

redress the suffering of the victims of Jim Crow, and finding some way to hold those *historically* responsible for that suffering *morally* responsible for that suffering. African Americans and their white allies at the time—Hodding Carter, III, for example, or Will Campbell, Mississippians both—simply had too little power in any of its many guises to implement projects of restorative justice. I find it hard to imagine whites in Alabama or Mississippi or Louisiana or in any other southern state voluntarily establishing, say in 1970, an investigative body to ascertain what really happened during the Jim Crow era and then forming truth-and-reconciliation type commissions to elicit testimony from wrongdoers and victims alike.

So it was that southern blacks and southern whites remained divided after 1965, unreconciled, each, for the most part, tensely tolerating the other, each having acute autobiographical knowledge of a dark past, and each knowing, too, that that past—that very peculiar, very potent racial past—was, to paraphrase Faulkner, not dead, not even past.

Some might dispute Faulkner's claim, saying that the South since the years of Jim Crow has changed a great deal. And so it has: today, the South is a more equitable, more humane, and more tolerant place than it was when I entered Delta State in 1965. This must never be forgotten. But change of this magnitude need not license us to forget the past; indeed, sometimes, and I think this is one of those times, change only throws the past into sharper relief. And in point of fact, the southern past lives in many ways: it resides in the hearts and minds of those of us who lived during that tumultuous time as teenagers or adults; in laws and governmental resolutions; in novels, films, academic texts, and classroom curricula; in numerous commemorative venues—streets named for the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., for example; Civil Rights museums in Memphis, Atlanta, Birmingham, and elsewhere in the region; and memorials of one sort or another, such as the Maya Lin's astonishingly moving, cleansing fountain at the Southern Poverty Law Center in Montgomery, which list the names of those killed for reasons of race, and the memorial in Tulsa, Oklahoma, commemorating the racial violence in that city, where, in 1921, white mobs burned a thirty-five block black business district and killed upward of 250 African Americans; the past resides also in heritage

tourism, such as the University of Virginia's civil rights tour; it resides, too, in our region's belated efforts at restorative justice and racial reconciliation; and, finally, the past resides in the everyday lives and deaths of southerners today.<sup>7</sup>

Restorative and reconciliation projects in the South have had their heyday only in the last 15 years or so. In keeping with the political nature of the region—it is, as I have written, neither a sovereign nor a unified political entity—these restorative projects have often been small-scale and spontaneous, of varying intensity and longevity, and piecemeal and decentralized. Alabama and Mississippi, for example, have focused on the pursuit of criminal justice by bringing a handful of the most notorious civil rights-era, civil rights-related killings into the present and prosecuting, convicting, and incarcerating those judged responsible for those murders.

▼ SEE BELOW [figure 3]

As you can see in figure 3 below, eleven murderers have been brought to justice, and while this may seem like a small number—Maya Lin's Montgomery monument names 40 individuals who were killed during this period (16 of whom were murdered in Mississippi). But those eleven are eleven more than many would have thought possible twenty years ago and shows real, if belated, progress in coming to grips with the past. Byron de la Beckwith's 1994 trial and conviction for the murder of civil rights activist Medgar Evers in 1963 is especially important because it established the precedent that crimes committed decades earlier were not subject to a time-bound statute of limitation, meaning that fanatics with blood on their hands were fair game for prosecution. Beckwith's conviction also served notice of the Movement-induced empowerment of African Americans: all white juries failed twice to convict him in 1964, while the jury that did convict Beckwith in 1994 contained eight blacks.<sup>8</sup>

We are apt to see still more efforts at restorative justice as criminal justice. The Southern Poverty Law Center, for example, has identified an additional 74 persons whom it calls "The Forgotten," folks who were killed between 1952 and 1968 in circumstances suggesting they were the victims of racially motivated violence. Thirty-one of the 74, by the way, were killed in Mississippi. We very well may see these names in tomorrow's newspapers, if and as authorities reinvestigate their deaths.

▼ figure 3

## Belated Justice

Robert Edward Chambliss convicted in 1977 of one count of murder in the 1963 of the 1963 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church bombing that killed four children.

Byron de la Beckwith convicted in 1994 of the 1963 murder of civil rights leader Medgar Evers in Mississippi.

Samuel Bowers convicted in 1998 for ordering the 1966 firebombing that killed civil right's leader Vernon Dahmer in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

Thomas Blanton convicted in 2001 of the 1963 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church bombing that killed four children.

Bobby Frank Cherry convicted in 2002 of the 1963 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church bombing that killed four children.

Ernest Avants convicted in 2003 for the 1966 murder of Ben Chester White in Natchez, Mississippi.

Edgar Ray Killen convicted in 2005 for the 1964 murders of three civil rights workers in Mississippi.

James Ford Seale convicted in 2007 for the 1964 kidnapping and killing of two Mississippi teenagers, Charles Eddie Moore and Henry Hezekiah Dee.

Hal Crimm, James Caston, and Charles Caston in 1999 for the 1970 murder of Rainey Pool in Humphrey's County, Mississippi.

7. On the SPLC Civil Rights Memorial, see [http://www.splcenter.org/crm/slideshows/crm\\_slideshow/crm\\_01.html](http://www.splcenter.org/crm/slideshows/crm_slideshow/crm_01.html) <[http://www.splcenter.org/crm/slideshows/crm%20\\_slideshow/crm\\_01.html](http://www.splcenter.org/crm/slideshows/crm%20_slideshow/crm_01.html)>. For the as yet uncompleted Tulsa Memorial, see <http://www.cityoftulsa.org/news/2008/March/3-24/JHFPark.asp>. Information on Virginia and Mississippi can be found at <http://www.virginia.edu/virginiavoyages/civilrights.html> <<http://www.virginia.edu/%20virginiavoyages/civilrights.html>> and [http://www.visitmississippi.org/itineraries/themes\\_african\\_american.asp](http://www.visitmississippi.org/itineraries/themes_african_american.asp), respectively.

8. See Maryann Vollers, *Ghosts of Mississippi: The Murder of Medgar Evers, the Trials of Byron De La Beckwith, and the Haunting of the New South* (Little Brown and Company, 1995).

Members of Congress have followed the logic of these “atonement” trials, as I call them, and cold cases, such as the killings of the SPLC’s “Forgotten,” to the point of introducing the “Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act” in 2007. Emmett Till, as many of you know, was a black teenager from Chicago who was murdered in 1955 in Money, Mississippi, by at least two white men. His killers were tried, found innocent by an all white jury, and then, a year later, sold their story, in which they admitted their guilt, to *Look* magazine for \$4000 (or about \$30,000 in today’s currency). They were not tried a second time. The Till Bill was sponsored by Georgia Representative John Lewis, a certified civil rights hero, and would authorize the appropriation of \$10 million a year over the 2008-2017 period for the Justice Department to investigate and prosecute civil rights-related unsolved homicides committed before 1970. The bill passed the House of Representatives with nearly unanimous support but now seems to be held up in the Senate.<sup>9</sup>

Moving now to the realm of restorative justice as repair and reparation (which, again, does not necessarily entail financial payments of any sort), we have, first, apology, southern style. As you can see, a few southern states—Alabama, Florida, Maryland, North Carolina, and

▼ SEE BELOW [figure 4]

Virginia—and a few southern universities and large corporations have in the past few years apologized or expressed regret for slavery, if not for Jim Crow per se. But in 2005 the U.S. Senate approved a resolution for its failure to enact federal anti-lynching legislation decades ago, legislation that was repeatedly blocked in committee by Senators from the South. Fittingly enough, the resolution was sponsored by southerners of differing parties, and almost 90 senators of both parties co-sponsored the resolution; Mississippi was the only southern state that lacked at least one sponsor. And there are now several House and Senate resolutions or bills apologizing for slavery and for racial segregation that appear lodged somewhere in the pipelines of the Congress, and several southern or near-southern states (Georgia, Texas, and Missouri) have considered or are now considering formal apologies for their role in the enslavement of Americans of African heritage.<sup>10</sup>

[▼ figure 4]

## Apologies for Slavery

### Universities

- University of Alabama
- University of North Carolina
- Brown University

### Companies

- Wachovia
- J. P. Morgan
- Aetna

### States

- Virginia
- Maryland
- North Carolina
- Alabama
- New Jersey
- Florida

### Religious Groups

- Southern Baptists
- The Episcopal Church

Southerners of both races, second, have also established mini-truth and reconciliation commissions at the local level. Though none of these enjoy the stature, influence, or cultural resonance of many of TRCs in the countries shown in figure 1, several of the South’s TRCs

▼ SEE BELOW [figure 5]

or their precursors have a fair amount of press and public attention, and some appear to have made a genuine difference, at least in their own communities. One of these is the 1898 Centennial Foundation, which, supported by both the city of Wilmington and the state of North Carolina, spearheaded a highly successful commemoration of the violent 1898 coup d’etat instigated by whites in the Democratic party to remove Wilmington’s bi-racial city government consisting of Republicans and Populists. The 1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission was established in 2000 to investigate the events surrounding the race riot, in which somewhere between 9 and 25 African Americans were killed (some say as many as 100), and scores more were run out of the city, some aided in their escape by sympathetic whites. One consequence of the Commission’s 2006 Report was that in 2007 the North Carolina State Senate expressed “profound regret that violence, intimidation and force” were used to overthrow a duly elected government.<sup>11</sup>

The violence in Rosewood, Florida, in 1922, was also rediscovered after 60 years of cultural amnesia. During almost a week of what can only be called a “white riot,” at least 6 African Americans and 2 whites were killed, and virtually every black home in the town was reported to have been destroyed. First through the efforts of an investigative reporter in 1982, and then through CBS’s TV program *60 Minutes* a year later, the story of Rosewood was resurrected. In the early 1990s, survivors of Rosewood filed suit against the state government for its failure to protect them and their families. The Florida legislature subsequently passed a bill calling for compensation to the survivors and their descendants, and in 1994 Florida Governor Lawton Chiles signed the Rosewood Compensation Bill, a \$2.1 million package to compensate for what Chiles termed a “blind act of bigotry.”<sup>12</sup>

Though some have called for an official Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Mississippi, we have yet to see any regional-wide or

[▼ figure 5]

## Finding Truth, Finding Peace

### Alabama

- The Birmingham Pledge

### Georgia

- Southern Anti-Defamation League
- Anti-Prejudice Consortium
- Coalition to Remember the 1906 Atlanta Race Riot
- Lemuel Penn Memorial Committee
- Moore’s Ford Memorial Foundation Committee
- Southern Truth and Reconciliation (STAR)

### Texas

- The Keepers of Love

### Florida

- Race with History
- Rosewood Heritage Foundation

9. On the Till Bill, see <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=s110-535>.

10. “Vote Condemns Past Failure to Act,” *Washington Post*, 14 June 2005. In 2007, U.S. Representative John Conyers of Michigan introduced a House Resolution “to acknowledge the fundamental injustice, cruelty, brutality and inhumanity of slavery...and to establish a commission to examine the institution of slavery, subsequently de jure and de facto racial and economic discrimination against African-Americans [and] to make recommendations to the Congress on appropriate remedies.” The Bill had only 24 co-sponsors (as of 15 April 2007), very few of whom were from southern states. See <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h110-40>. See, also, “Contrition for America’s Curse,” *Washington Post*, 12 April 2007, and “A Slavery Apology, but Debate Continues,” *The New York Times*, 13 January 2008.

11. On Wilmington, see <http://www.ah.dcr.state.nc.us/1898-wrrc/report/report.htm>, and Melton A. McLaurin, “Commemorating Wilmington’s Racial Violence of 1898: From Individual to Collective Memory,” *Southern Cultures*, vol.4, # 3 (2000), pp. 35-57.

12. See <http://www.displaysforschools.com/rosewood.html>.

state-level TRC-type hearings, or hear any official apologies for Jim Crow from any southern state. Nor have we witnessed purges of any magnitude, and, other than the Rosewood Compensation Act, we've no record of any southern state or organization housed in the region, such as the Southern Baptist Convention, which did issue an apology for slavery in 1995, offer financial reparations to African Americans.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps, some say, this is as it should be. We've now repented for our past sins, we've atoned enough. The past, after all, is THE PAST, and nothing—not a single act of restorative justice—can ever change that fact. Why, then, root around there, especially when doing so is without doubt difficult, both emotionally and logistically, and costly, too, possibly even counter-productive in that old wounds, and old hostilities, may be brought to the surface, relived, in pain, yet again? There is, moreover, the issue of personal responsibility: why should those of us who were not yet alive, or who were too young to be moral agents in our own right, apologize or otherwise try to repair the damages done by past wrongs that we ourselves did not commit? This is the reason Mississippi senator Thad Cochran gave Washington Post columnist William Raspberry—an African American born and reared in Mississippi—for his, that is, Cochran's unwillingness to co-sponsor the Senate resolution apologizing for not passing the anti-lynching legislation about which I spoke earlier. "I'm not in the business," Cochran said, "of apologizing for what someone else did or didn't do." He added that he "deplored and regretted" both the lynchings and the fact that those who lynched went unpunished, "but I'm not culpable."<sup>14</sup>

One can thus understand why many are reluctant to dig up and through the South's Jim Crow past, especially so because we might find what people very like our fathers and grandfathers, or friends of the family, perhaps, or maybe even kin, what these people did.

We might find, as well, what many white southerners around my age—again, I was 17 years old when I entered Delta State in 1965—did or did not do during the 1960s.

Perhaps we might even remember what we ourselves did or didn't do: at the age of 17, I should have known better, I probably did know better, and surely I could have acted better; but, just as surely, I choose not to do so.

So one can appreciate the argument that we should let go of the past, empathize, even, with it. But the problem with this line of thought is that the past just won't stay...in the past: the past, as we have seen, haunts repair and sabotages personal and collective amnesia.

Earlier I wrote that the past lives and that one way in which it did was in the lives and deaths of those in today's South. Let me note some of the legacies of Mississippi's racial past.

▼ SEE BELOW [figure 6]

First, preliminary data gathered by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2007 indicate that African Americans in the state were unemployed at rates 2 ½ times greater than whites: the rate for blacks was 10.5%, for whites, 3.9%. Since 2005, the white unemployment rate has decreased, while the black unemployment rate has increased.

▼ SEE BELOW [figure 7 and 8]

Second, according to the U.S. Census in 2000, white Mississippians with a high school diploma (and no further education) earned \$8000 per year more than equally-educated African Americans in the state (\$28,875 v. \$20,792), a 39 percent bonus of sorts for whites. On the other end of the education spectrum, black Mississippians with doctorates or other professional degrees earned an average of about \$50,600 per year; their white counterparts earned, on average, more \$90,000 a year, a differential of almost \$40,000, or 78 percent more than the annual yearly earnings of their equally educated African American peers.

▼ SEE BELOW [figure 9]

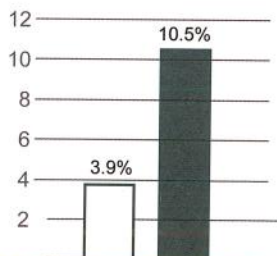
Third, in 2005/2006, according to data collected by the U.S. Census's Current Population Survey, 13 percent of white Mississippians earned too little income to bring themselves out of poverty, just about the national percentage of 12 percent. A third of African Americans in the country were labeled "officially poor" by this criterion; but 43 percent of blacks in Mississippi were poor.

▼ SEE BELOW [figure 10]

Fourth, the death rate—that is, the number of deaths per 100,000 people—for black Mississippians in 2004 was 20 percent higher than the rate for white Mississippians.

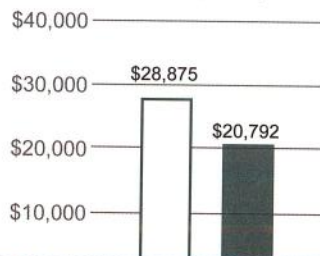
[figure 6]

**Unemployment Rate in MS (2007)**



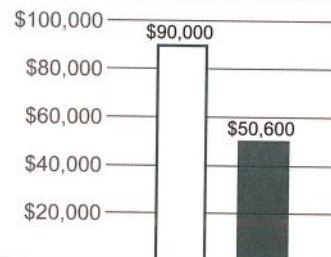
[figure 7]

**Pay Rate in MS (2000, High School Diploma)**



[figure 8]

**Pay Rate in MS (2000, Doctorate or Professional Degree)**



13. A historian, Howard Ball, proposed this in a brief 2006 article in the /History News Network/, "Its Time Mississippi Established a truth and Reconciliation Commission," <http://hnn.us.articles /29718.html>). On the SBC, see [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/ mi\\_m1058/ is\\_n21\\_v112/ai\\_17332136\\_](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/ mi_m1058/ is_n21_v112/ai_17332136_)  
 14. William Raspberry, "A 'Sorry' Excuse from Cochran," Washington Post, 20 June 2005. Raspberry noted in his column that Cochran did, however, co-sponsor bills apologizing for the government's treatment of Native Americans and for the World War II internment of Japanese-Americans, acts for which Senator Cochran could not possibly have been personally culpable.



▼ SEE BELOW [figure 11]

Fifth, and most distressing, in 2005, the most recent year for which we've reliable state-level data by race, Mississippi's infant mortality rate was the highest in the nation, and the racial differential here was huge. For whites, the rate was 6.6 deaths per 1000 births; for African Americans, the rate was 17 deaths per 1000 births, up from just a few years earlier, as high as it was 20 years previously, and almost three times the rate for whites.<sup>15</sup>

The past itself may not be dead...but it does kill. None of these racial differences in life-chances and, indeed, in life itself can possibly be explained without a deep understanding of both the state's Jim Crow past and how that past continues to be transmuted into the present.

Historical reckoning and racial reconciliation in the American South are most assuredly hindered by the economic disparities between black and white suggested by the economic and mortality statistics, disparities that exist in every state in the country as well. They're also hindered by other differences between the races, profound, schismatic, dissimilarities in cultural memory, in racial attitudes and understandings, in political partisanship and voting behavior, and in preferences in social policies that affect racial stratification. On the latter difference, I'll point to just one public poll conducted for USA Today/CNN in 2002. There, 55 percent of African Americans said they believed the U.S. government SHOULD pay reparations to blacks for slavery and past discrimination, while 90 percent of whites said the government SHOULD NOT pay reparations.

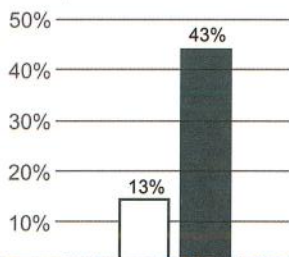
Despite these differences of class, memory and affect, southerners of both races, it is clear, are increasingly willing to confront their very difficult and very much shared past. As we have seen, we southerners have explored a variety of avenues of reconciliation and restorative justice—criminal trials, TRCs, apologies, reparations, memorials—with some success. I'll readily admit I do not know the path to reconciliation. I know only that it is a goal for which we must strive. In a society premised on equality, all of us have a responsibility

for the well being—material, physical, and emotional—of each of us, including our brothers and sisters across the color line, in and out of the South. I sense, too, that we have a debt to those no longer with us, to, among others, the 74 "Forgotten" catalogued by the Southern Poverty Law Center. (See the list of names at the end of this booklet). It is a debt to understand and remember their travails, their hopes, their essential humanness. To do less is to disrespect their courage and sacrifices, and to do nothing merely because we are unable fully to repair and restore, unable fully to compensate and commemorate, is effectively to forget the past and its obligations, forget the crimes committed then, and pretend that the past never happened and that all the suffering and loss and pain of so many for so long is of no public or communal import. And that, it seems to me, is unacceptable. So perhaps we should listen anew to those voices from the past. Perhaps, too, its time to move, emotionally as well as cognitively, from "memory-as-possibility" to "memory-as-necessity."<sup>16</sup> Perhaps we are not responsible for the past; but might we be responsible for a present impregnated by the past, a present that maims and destroys and kills precisely because of its past? On that note, I'll conclude with quotations from two southerners, one black and one white.

The first is from Elizabeth Eckford, who was one of the "Little Rock 9," African American high school students who desegregated Little Rock, Arkansas's Central High School in September, 1957. At the fiftieth anniversary of that event, she said, "There can never be true reconciliation until we acknowledge our painful and shared past." The second is from William Winter, the governor of Mississippi from 1980 to 1984, and the person for whom Ole Miss's William Winter Institute of Racial Reconciliation is aptly named. "In light of that haunting question [i.e., why did not white southerners after 1954 accept desegregation with "dignity and goodwill?"], let us hope that the next generation of southerners will not have to ask the same thing about us as we confront the new challenge of an increasingly multiracial society. Let us be reminded, therefore, that there is still much for us to do to complete the task of racial reconciliation."<sup>17</sup>

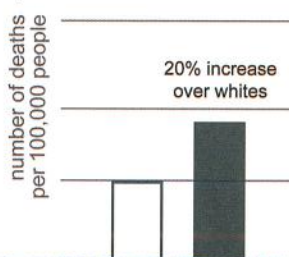
[figure 9]

### Poverty Rate in MS (2005/2006)



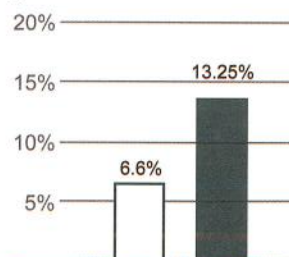
[figure 10]

### Death Rate in MS (2004)



[figure 11]

### Infant Mortality Rate in MS (2005)



15. Statistics on unemployment are found at <http://www.bls.gov/lau/ptablefull2007.pdf>; on earnings, [http://www.higheredinfo.org/raceethnicity/Average\\_Annual\\_Earnings\\_by\\_State\\_Educational\\_Attainment\\_Race\\_and\\_Gender\\_2000.xls](http://www.higheredinfo.org/raceethnicity/Average_Annual_Earnings_by_State_Educational_Attainment_Race_and_Gender_2000.xls); on poverty, <http://www.stathealthfacts.org/profileind.jsp?ind+14&cat=1&rgn=26&print=1>; on overall mortality, see <http://www.statehealthfacts.org>; on infant mortality, "In Turnabout, Infant Deaths Climb in South," *New York Times* 22 April 2007.

16. The quote about "memory as necessity" is from Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (Transaction Publishers, 1994), p. 37.

17. Eckford, quoted in "Little Rock celebrates civil rights pioneers; Others privately relive their roles in one of the ugliest episodes in modern U.S. history," *Toronto Star*, 26 September 2007; William Winter, "Reimagining the South," *Southern Cultures*, vol. 11, #3(2005), p. 92. Anyone at all interested in restorative justice in the South should visit the very useful website of the University of Mississippi's William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation (<http://www.olemiss.edu/winterinstitute>).

**THE FORGOTTEN: Anderson, Andrew Lee** — Marion, AR, 1963: ruled justifiable homicide, and no arrests were made. | **Andrews, Frank** — Lisman, AL, 1964: Andrews was shot in the back by a white sheriff's deputy. The county solicitor said the victim was attacking another deputy, and no arrests were made. | **Banks, Isadore** — Marion, AR, 1954: Banks' charred corpse was found chained to a tree. Black press reports speculated he was killed by whites who wanted his land. His property was later rented by white farmers. | **Bolden, Larry** — Chattanooga, TN, 1958: Bolden, 15, was shot by a white policeman. No arrests were made. | **Brazier, James** — Dawson, GA, 1958: Brazier was beaten to death in front of his wife and children by two police officers. County Sheriff Z.T. Matthews was later quoted in the Washington Post saying, "There's nothing like fear to keep niggers in line." | **Brewer, Thomas** — Columbus, GA, 1956: Brewer was instrumental in forming a local chapter of the NAACP in 1937. He was shot seven times outside his office by white politician Lucio Flowers. A grand jury failed to indict. | **Brooks, Hilliard** — Montgomery, AL, 1952: Brooks was shot by a police officer after initially refusing to get off a city bus when the driver claimed he had not paid his fare. A coroner said the murder was justified because Brooks resisted arrest. | **Brown, Charles** - Yazoo City, MS, 1957: A white male shot Brown, who was visiting the white man's sister. The Justice Department handed the case over to the state. | **Brown, Jessie** - Winona, MS, 1965: The 1965 NAACP annual report claimed white farmer R.M. Gibson killed Brown. | **Brumfield, Carrie** - Franklinton, LA, 1967: Brumfield was found shot to death in his car on a rural road. He was shot once in the chest with a 22-caliber revolver. | **Brumfield, Eli** - McComb, MS, 1961: Police officer B.F. Elmore alleged self-defense after shooting Brumfield. Police claimed Brumfield jumped from his car with a pocket knife after police pulled him over for speeding. | **Caston, Silas (Ernest)** — Jackson, MS, 1964: Caston was shot by a local police officer. CORE and NAACP filed a civil suit against Deputy Sheriff Herbert Sullivan. The result of that suit is unknown. | **Cloninger, Clarence** — Gaston, NC, 1960: Cloninger died while incarcerated. Authorities denied him medical attention after he suffered a heart attack. | **Countryman, Willie** — Dawson, GA., 1958: Police officer W.B. Cherry was cleared of murder charges after police said he shot Countryman "in self defense in the line of duty." | **Dahmon, Vincent** — Natchez, MS, 1966: Dahmon, 65, was shot in the head around the time of a march in support of James Meredith. | **Daniels, Woodrow Wilson** - Water Valley, MS, 1958: Sheriff Buster Treloar identified by four witnesses as the man who beat Daniels to death in a prison, was freed after 23 minutes of deliberation by an all-white jury. "By God," Treloar said after the trial. "Now I can get back to rounding up bootleggers and damn niggers." | **Dumas, Joseph Hill** - Perry, FL, 1962: Florida Governor Farris Bryant suspended constable Henry Sauls in connection with the shooting of 19-year-old Dumas. Sauls was indicted by a federal grand jury. The result of indictment is unclear. | **Evans, Pheld** - Canton, MS, 1964: Medgar Evers identified Evans as having been killed under mysterious circumstances. | **Evanston, J.E.** - Long Lake, MS, 1955: Evanston's body is fished out of Long Lake in December. Evanston was a teacher in the local elementary school. | **Greene, Mattie** - Ringgold, GA, 1960: Greene is killed when a bomb explodes under her house. | **Greenwood, Jasper** - Vicksburg, MS, 1964: Greenwood was found shot to death near his car on a rural road. Police said the slaying was not racially motivated. | **Griffin, Jimmie Lee** - Sturgis, MS, 1965: Griffin was killed in a hit-and-run accident. A coroner's report revealed Griffin was run over at least twice. | **Hall, A.C.** — Macon, GA, 1962: Hall was shot and killed after a white woman claimed he stole a pistol from her car. He was shot by police as he ran away. | **Hamilton, Rogers** — Lowndes County, AL, 1957: Hamilton, 19, was taken from his home by a group of white men and shot to death. Hamilton was allegedly warned to stay away from black girls in the town of Hayneville. No charges were brought in the case. | **Hampton, Collie** — Winchester, KY, 1966: Hampton was shot by police officers after allegedly threatening a police officer. | **Harris, Alphonso** — Albany, GA, 1966: Harris, a member of SCLC, died after allegedly organizing a walkout by black students at a school in Grenada, MS. He was killed in Georgia in response to previous civil rights activity there. | **Henry, Izell** — Greensburg, LA, 1954: Izell was brutally beaten a day after voting. He suffered permanent brain damage and died five years later. | **Hill, Arthur James** — Villa Rica, GA, 1965: Hill was shot during an argument with whites. One suspect was held on voluntary manslaughter charge. | **Hunter, Ernest** — St. Mary's, GA, 1958: Hunter was shot and killed while in jail following an arrest on charges he was interfering with an officer. | **Jackson, Luther** — Philadelphia, MS, 1959: Jackson was killed by police after he and his girlfriend were found talking in their car, which was stalled in a ditch. Police claim Jackson attacked them. | **Jells, Ernest** — Clarksdale, MS, 1964: Jells was accused of stealing a banana from a grocery and pointing a rifle at pursuing police officers. The officers were exonerated. | **Jeter, Joe Franklin** — Atlanta, GA, 1958: Jeter was killed by police in front of his family, who were also arrested and convicted in connection with a gathering that police said turned into a melee. A grand jury found the slaying was justified. | **Lee, John** — Goshen Springs, MS, 1965: Lee's body was found beaten on a country road. | **Lee, Willie Henry** — Rankin County, MS, 1965: Lee, who was known to have attended civil rights meetings, was found beaten on a country road. An autopsy revealed he died by strangulation from gas. | **Lillard, Richard** — Nashville, TN, 1958: Lillard died after a beating from three white guards at a local workhouse. All three were acquitted of murder charges. | **Love, George** — Indianola, MS, 1958: Love was killed in a gun battle with police who believed he was responsible for a murder and arson. He was later cleared of any connection to the murder. | **Mahone, Maybelle** — Molena, GA, 1956: Mahone was killed by a white man for "sassing" him. The man was initially found guilty, but later found not guilty by reason of insanity. | **Maxwell, Sylvester** — Canton, MS, 1963: Maxwell's castrated and mutilated body was found by his brother-in-law less than 500 yards from the home of a white family. | **McNair, Robert** — Pelahatchie, MS, 1965: McNair was killed by a town constable. | **Melton, Clinton** — Sumner, MS, 1956: Elmer Otis Kimbell was cleared in Melton's death. Kimbell claimed Melton fired at him three times before he returned fire with a shotgun. "No- gun was found in Melton's car or on his body. | **Miller, James Andrew** — Jackson, GA, 1964: Miller was shot by whites a few days after being beaten. A suspect was cleared after the coroner ruled he fired in self-defense. | **Mixon, Booker T.** — Clarksdale, MS, 1959: Mixon's body was found lying on the side of the road, completely nude. Police claimed it was a hit-and-run, though family members cited his naked body and the extensive amount of flesh torn from his body as evidence of murder. | **Montgomery, Nehemiah** — Merigold, MS, 1964: Montgomery, 60, was shot by police after allegedly refusing to pay for gas. Police were acquitted, and the shooting was called justifiable homicide. | **Morris, Frank** — Eerriday, LA, 1964: Morris, who owned a shoe store, was killed when a gas stove exploded during an arson. Morris, who lived in a room adjoining the store, was ordered to return to his room by the men who started the fire. An extensive Justice Department investigation was conducted, but the outcome is unclear. | **Motley, James Earl** — Wetumpka, AL, 1967: Elmore County Deputy Sheriff Harvey Conner was cleared in the death of Motley, who died in prison after suffering three severe blows to the head. | **O'Quinn, Sam** — Centreville, MS, 1959: O'Quinn, derided by some local whites for being "uppity," was shot after joining the NAACP. | **Orsby, Hubert** — Pickets, MS, 1964: Orsby's body was found in the Black River. It was reported that he was wearing a t-shirt with "CORE," written on it, representing the Congress of Racial Equality. | **Payne, Larry** — Memphis, TN, 1968: Payne, 16, was killed by a shotgun blast fired by a patrolman as he emerged from a basement in a housing development. | **Pickett, C.H.** — Columbus, GA, 1957: The part-time minister was beaten to death while in police custody. | **Pitts, Albert** | **Pitts, David** | **Johnson, Marshall** | **McPharland, Ernest** — Monroe, LA, 1960: A white employer was arrested and then released in the shooting of five of his employees, four of whom died. The victims were accused of making threats. The employer was never charged. | **Powell, Jimmy** — Brooklyn, NY, 1964: Powell, 15, was fatally shot by a Brooklyn police officer. The officer's exoneration by a grand jury sparked riots in Harlem. | **Prather, William Roy** — Corinth, MS, 1959: Prather, 15, was killed in an anti-black Halloween prank. One of eight youths involved was indicted on manslaughter charges. | **Queen, Johnny** — Fayette, MS, 1965: A white off-duty constable was named in the pistol slaying of Johnny Queen. The shooting was not connected to any arrest. | **Rasberry, Donald** — Okolona, MS, 1965: Rasberry was shot to death by his plantation boss. | **Robinson, Fred** — Edisto Island, SC, 1960: Robinson's body was found washed ashore on August 5. His eyes were reportedly gouged out and his skull crushed. | **Robinson, Johnny** — Birmingham, AL, 1963: Robinson, 16, was shot in the back by a policeman on the same day as the 16th Street Church bombing. Police said the victim had thrown stones at white youths driving through the area. | **Sanford, Willie Joe** — Hawkinsville, GA, 1957: Sanford's naked body was raised from the bottom of a creek where it had been wired to undergrowth in the water. The result of a grand jury investigation is unknown. | **Scott Jr., Marshall** — New Orleans, LA, 1965: Scott was put into solitary confinement in a New Orleans jail. He died without receiving any medical attention. There were no arrests in the case. | **Shelby, Jessie James** — Yazoo City, MS, 1956: Shelby, 23, was fatally wounded by a police officer who claimed he shot Shelby because he resisted arrest. | **Singleton, W.G.** — Shelby, NC, 1957: Singleton died from third-degree burns suffered in an explosion and fire. | **Smith, Ed** — State Line, MS, 1958: A grand jury refused to indict L.D. Clark in the death of Smith, who was shot in his yard in front of his wife. Clark later reportedly bragged about the killing. | **Stewart, Eddie James** — Crystal Springs, MS, 1966: Stewart was reportedly beaten and shot while in police custody. Police claimed he was shot while trying to escape. | **Taylor, Isaiah** — Ruleville, MS, 1964: Taylor was shot by a police officer after allegedly lunging at him with a knife. The shooting "was ruled a justifiable homicide. | **Thomas, Freddie Lee** — LeFlore County, MS, 1965: Federal investigators looked into the death of Thomas, 16. Thomas' brother believed he was murdered as a warning against black voter registration. The result of the investigation is unknown. | **Triggs, Saleam** — Hattiesburg, MS, 1965: The body of Mrs. Triggs was found mysteriously burned to death. | **Varner, Hubert** — Atlanta, GA, 1966: Varner, 16, was killed when a gunman fired into a group of black teenagers. The gunman allegedly believed the teenagers made a comment to his white companion. The result of a federal investigation is unknown. | **Walker, Clifton** - Adams County, MS, 1964: Walker was killed by a shotgun blast at close range. The result of a federal investigation is unknown. | **Waymers, James** - Allendale, SC, 1965: A white man is acquitted in the shooting death of Waymers after entering a plea of self-defense. | **Wilder, John Wesley** - Ruston, LA, 1965: A white policeman was accused of Wilder's death, and a coroner's jury ruled the slaying was justifiable homicide. | **Williamson, Rodell** — Camden, AL, 1967: Williamson's body was recovered from the Alabama River after it snagged on a fisherman's line. Williamson was active in the Wilcox County branch of the NAACP, but local sheriff P.C. Jenkins said there were no signs of foul play. | **Wooden, Archie** — Camden, AL, 1967: Wooden, 16, bled to death after either jumping or falling onto a sapling in a ditch. The cut sapling severed an artery. A newspaper report said the Mobile office of the FBI made a civil rights violation inquiry into the incident. The results of that inquiry are unknown.





**The Delta Center for  
Culture & Learning**  
DELTA STATE UNIVERSITY

The Delta Center for Culture and Learning is an interdisciplinary program within Delta State University. Its mission is to promote the broad understanding of the history and culture of the Mississippi Delta and its significance to the rest of the world. Its activities include classes, field trips and heritage tours, oral history projects, historic preservation efforts, and service learning and community outreach programs.

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