

Neighborly Surveillance: The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission and the Development of a Post-Jim Crow Ideological Apparatus

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Article

Neighborhood Surveillance: The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission and the Development of a Post-Jim Crow Ideological Apparatus

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Abstract

The relations of production in Deep South regions like the Mississippi Delta require a high degree of control over race and class configurations. While the overt, de jure White supremacy that marked the post-Reconstruction era allowed for effective repression of dissent, the promise of federal intervention and grassroots organizing during the years of the civil rights movement required White elites to recalibrate methods of control. By integrating theories of racialization of space, internal colonialism, and Althusser's (2006) notion of the ideological state apparatus, I suggest that this transition from overt to implicit control was accomplished by creating a culture of neighborhood surveillance in which everyday Whites were deputized to surveil and report on civil rights organizing at the grassroots level. By neighborhood surveillance, I refer to surveillance between and amongst private citizens enacted outside the purview of the formal state but in the interest of the powerful elite who control the state. I document this process through analysis of the archives of the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, an official state agency tasked with spying on and counteracting civil rights activity. These records demonstrate the extent to which non-state actors assumed the roles originally exercised by the de jure Jim Crow regime. Beyond augmenting understandings of the civil rights movement-era US South, this article contributes analytical insights to social and ideological transitions in other post-colonial, post-authoritarian spatial contexts.

Introduction

On October 1, 1964, the director of the Sunflower County Health Department, Walter Rose, wrote to the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission with concerns about a new chiropractor who had moved into town. There had been several out-of-state license plates in the chiropractor's driveway and rumors of civil rights connections were in the air (Rose 1964). Tom Scarbrough, an employee of the Sovereignty Commission whose bailiwick included the Mississippi Delta region, conducted a thorough investigation. The Sunflower County sheriff had received no complaints about the chiropractor, Dr. Robert Broadbent, nor had the sheriff in South Carolina where Broadbent had lived previously. Credit checks proved to be similarly uninteresting. It quickly became apparent that Broadbent was likely just a chiropractor: "Everyone whom I talked with was of the opinion that he had committed no offense but the fact that he came into Indianola about the same time as the group of COFO white beatniks arrived place a cloud of suspicion around him" (Scarbrough 1964b). Scarbrough waited until the end of his investigation to confront Dr. Broadbent, who provided a relatively mundane backstory: he had moved to Sunflower County because he had heard there was a need for chiropractors in the Delta. The out-of-state license plates belonged to his practice partners who had recently relocated to the nearby communities of Drew and Clarksdale. This

explanation, that Mississippi was a good place to be a chiropractor, passed the muster of Scarbrough, who concluded, bizarrely: “This, to me, is understandable because there is nothing more satisfying to a Negro than being sick and having some white man rub him” (Scarbrough 1964a).

This invasive investigation into a new professional, prompted by the suspicions of his White neighbors, was part of a larger practice of surveillance in the Delta region of Mississippi. The Mississippi Delta, one of the most agriculturally productive regions in the United States, is also its poorest region and a site of deeply rooted White supremacy and Black communal struggle. Despite significant progress in political reform, the underlying economic and class structure of the Delta has remained largely unchanged; resolving this puzzling consistency requires elucidating processes of social reproduction that occur outside of the formal state. The struggle to reform southern politics and its backlash required constant innovation of mechanisms of social control on the part of White elites; it was these mechanisms that ensured the longevity of racialized economic exploitation in the region. The more general argument of this paper concerns the role of surveillance in a post-internal colonial context. Between the end of Reconstruction and the federal legislative successes of the civil rights movement, the relations of production (that is, the set of mandatory social relationships that govern interactions between economic classes) in the Mississippi Delta evoked the internal colony, a system of intra-national regional inequality in which the “peripheral” regions of the nation are treated as sites of extraction, rather than enjoying full integration into the core (Clark 1989 [1965]; Hechter 1977). Social space was contested between White elites concerned with extracting agricultural wealth and a subaltern Black population motivated to build democratic community. As the *de jure* architecture of this internal colony was eroded, the economic elite of Mississippi sought to ensure the persistence of colonial modes of extraction and social life by cultivating an atmosphere of *neighborly surveillance* in which private Mississippians assumed the surveillance responsibilities of the state. I employ the word “neighborly” for two reasons. First, I draw attention to the lateral nature of surveillance that occurred during this transitional period, extending work on “horizontal surveillance” (Reeves 2017) to include surveillance that fell outside the purview of law enforcement agencies. Second, the term neighborly invokes the irony embedded in the rhetoric of Mississippi and other Deep South states who simultaneously encouraged mass surveillance while also crafting an image of racial harmony and hospitality. The presumption that local business leaders and other “regular” citizens might be spying on civil rights activity (and even quotidian instances of racial integration) inculcated a sense of social control that survived the end of *de jure* segregation and its machinery like the Sovereignty Commission. This collusion of anti-democratic popular forces worked by ensuring that the ongoing production of the social space of places like the Mississippi Delta would persist to the benefit of local White elites, even at the cost of economic stagnation.

Race, Space, and Neighborly Surveillance

The spatial dimension of production in the Mississippi Delta is an important element of the forces manufacturing its stagnation. This article is concerned with the techniques and strategies employed by those in power in Mississippi, and the Delta in particular, to ensure that neither the economic nor social layout of the region were able to undergo meaningful change. This task included maintaining the image of an agricultural region (even as farming provides minimal employment opportunities) and a racially segregated space isolated from the rest of the nation. I approach social space beginning with the model proposed by Neely and Samura (2011) in which space and race are mutually contested and constituted through interactions over time. The Delta operated as a “White space,” in which “space works to facilitate patterned behaviors that normalize White resource hoarding, racially oppressive hierarchies, and the routine subjugation of people of color” (Embrick and Moore 2020:1937). Such spaces not only preserve the material balance of power in each space but also create psychological justification for the white elite who oversee these systems of exploitation and control. The larger configuration of space created and preserved in Mississippi Delta functions as an internal colony for the rest of the country; that is, the region is governed as a place from which to extract natural wealth while fostering inequality and preventing meaningful integration into the “core” society and economy. This conception of an internal colony reflects both the

social-psychological traits described by scholars such as Clark (1989 [1965]) and the economic and racial exploitation model developed by Hechter (1977). In his writing on the American ghetto, Clark (1989 [1965]) describes a community that resembles life in the Mississippi Delta: deteriorating housing, high rates of infant and maternal mortality, poverty, and joblessness. Clark's (1989 [1965]) conception of the ghetto-as-colony highlights the dual nature of space in the Mississippi Delta: the vast wealth contained in the region's sprawling agricultural fields surrounds, but bears almost no social entanglement with, the pockets of concentrated poverty in its small towns and hamlets. The ghetto—the neglected outposts of the internal colony—“is not a viable community. It cannot support its people; most have to leave it for their daily jobs. Its businesses are geared toward the satisfaction of personal needs and are marginal to the economy of the city as a whole” (Clark 1989 [1965]: 27). Hechter (1977) moves beyond Clark's (1989 [1965]) social-psychological framework and offers a model that accounts for how regions are embedded in national economies. This pattern of national development resulted in regional inequality, which in turn sustained itself through localized systems of ethnic and racial inequality. Hechter (1977: 9) envisions the process of internal colonialism as the result of an “uneven wave of modernization over state territory” that:

creates relatively advanced and less advanced groups. As a consequence of this initial fortuitous advantage, there is crystallization of the unequal distribution of resources and power between the two groups. The superordinate group, or core, seeks to stabilize and monopolize its advantages through policies aiming at the institutionalization of the existing stratification system. It attempts to regulate the allocation of social roles such that those roles commonly defined as having high prestige are reserved for its members... [resulting in] a cultural division of labor.

America's internal colony was sustained by the national exploitation of the Delta and the white Delta elites' exploitation of enslaved people, tenant farmers, and the rural black poor.

Internal colonies are also sources of conflict; Hechter's (1977) empirical case concerns ethnic division and rebellion in the United Kingdom, and Clark (1989 [1965]) highlights the psychological conflict that people experience because of the tension between wanting to improve communities and trying to leave them. Despite the outward appearance of social and economic stagnation that marks such spaces, maintaining them as sites of White supremacy and Black exploitation requires the active work of local elites and institutions. The work of preserving the racial balance of power was challenged by the civil rights movement and other campaigns against racial exclusion and exploitation, requiring the white elite to recalibrate local institutions and find new vectors to reproduce their ideology; this was accomplished largely by creating parallel systems of schools and embedding the mechanisms of racial inequality within local institutions and in private life.

Transitions out of colonial governance have left lingering police powers in other contexts, such as the Philippines. Historians have noted how the remnants of American security forces in the Philippines “remained a potent instrument of executive power” (McCoy 2009: 13) and continued to be subject to US influence post-independence. This influence persisted because of the strong “perception of order as synonymous with legitimacy” (McCoy 2009: 55). The work of policing in ensuring stability is closely linked to the project of defining and ossifying racial hierarchies in both the colony (the Philippines) and metropole (the United States), generating new forms of social reproduction that outlasted formal colonization in both contexts (Kramer 2006). This analysis of global colonialism provides a useful reference for the internal colonial practices that characterized the Jim Crow South as it experienced the legal reforms of the civil rights movement period.

Lay citizen involvement in surveillance and policing has been documented in other areas of life in the United States. Analyses of social phenomena like neighborhood watches reveals a tendency in American culture to juxtapose individualism and vigilantism as a form of civic life (Reeves 2017). This lateral surveillance

(Reeves 2017: 14) has intensified in the digital era but typifies many collaborations between police and citizen. Reeves' (2017) analysis is particularly important in noting that passive awareness of surveillance is not the only operative force—the implication that citizen spies are reporting behavior to state authorities serves to further regulate social behavior. However, this analysis primarily considers situations in which citizens are deputized into the formal work of the police; this article highlights ways in which police power was transferred to the public.

Private citizens have also played an active role in public surveillance elsewhere as a competitor to state power in other cases. Writing about vigilante violence committed by White New Yorkers in the 1980s, Mann (2017: 57) describes a cohort who “wrested the justified use of force out of the hands of state authorities and wielded it without fear of retribution from prosecution.” The system of neighborhood surveillance is reminiscent of this “vigilante spirit” but is tempered with the veneer of performative southern hospitality and collusion with state actors. With the aid of neighborhood surveillance, the White space of the post-Jim Crow Deep South was reconfigured to preserve the system of productive relations even as the state apparatus was reformed; as Althusser (2006: 88) writes, the “reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order.” The overt violence of Jim Crow embodies the model of the repressive state apparatus Althusser (2006) identifies in the core of Marxist theories of the state; reforms imposed by the federal government required powerful elites of the White South to transfer responsibility for preserving relations from a repressive state apparatus to an ideological state apparatus that sanctioned violations of racial norms and inculcated cultures of fear and mass surveillance. As an ideological apparatus, this new system deputized everyday people into enforcing racial norms; the chief agents of the state were now one's acquaintances and neighbors.

Archives of Neighborhood Surveillance

This article explores records housed in the online archives of the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission. The Sovereignty Commission was created as an official state agency in Mississippi in 1956, shortly after the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision held that de jure segregation in schools violated the United States Constitution. The Commission was invested with the broad power to combat any attempts to impose federal civil rights legislation on Mississippi and other actions that purportedly threatened the state's “sovereignty.” The Commission was empowered to serve subpoenas and conduct investigations, impose fines and jail sentences, and produce propaganda that highlighted the state's so-called way of life (Butler 2002). The Commission continued to operate as a state-funded agency until 1977, when Governor William Winter vetoed its funding bill and the Legislature declined to take up the issue. The Commission produced 132,000 pages of records and spied on nearly 90,000 people during its operation (Rowe-Sims and Pilcher 1999), and those documents were eventually processed and catalogued by the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. These records were later digitized and made available online for public use (Schwind, Rowe-Sims, and Pilcher 2002).

In addition to the internal correspondence and written reports of the Sovereignty Commission, the archives also include extensive records of the various Citizens' Councils of Mississippi. The Citizens' Councils, founded in Sunflower County, were local quasi-governmental groups in Mississippi that organized in response to *Brown v. Board*. The Citizens' Councils were composed of local business elites who tasked themselves with devising extralegal means of preserving social segregation despite legal rulings and pressure from federal authorities. Throughout its history, the Sovereignty Commission worked closely with local Citizens' Councils by publicizing the Councils' radio and television programs, sharing intelligence on suspected agitators, and transferring money from state appropriations to local chapters of the Council (McMillen 1994).

The archives contain a thorough accounting of the inner workings of the Commission and its allies in the Citizens' Councils. These data provide a rare portrait of state surveillance and anti-civil rights governance;

such archives are frequently destroyed or hidden behind onerous access protocols (Wisser and Blanco-Rivera 2016). I follow Stoler (2010) in treating this archival material as a record of an exploitative political regime in transition; rather than an objective accounting of a historical moment, these archives reflect the ongoing anxieties of a ruling elite in the face of broader social change. In searching the archives, I collected material related to investigations in the Mississippi Delta region as well as material related to the Citizens' Councils.

The work of Zack Van Landingham, a former FBI agent, provides an illustrative case. On January 27, 1959, he sent a letter to Wilbur Maxwell, president of the school board in the north Sunflower County community of Drew. "Mac," he wrote, "it was surely good to see and renew old acquaintances with you.... I would greatly appreciate your keeping me advised of any developments in the racial situation in and around Drew" (Van Landingham 1959c). Van Landingham had similar correspondence with the police chief in Indianola (1959d), the sheriff of Sunflower County (1959d), the postmaster in Drew, and a local Citizens' Council leader (1959b). In his regular rounds in the Mississippi Delta, Van Landingham and his colleagues at the Sovereignty Commission cultivated an extensive network of informants and informal deputies to monitor the extent to which civil rights activity had spread in the region. These private citizens took on the work of maintaining segregation readily; in a follow-up visit to business leaders in Sunflower County, Van Landingham (1959e)c consulted with the owner of a hardware store about the presence of "racial agitators" in Drew and the owner of a lumber yard (and member of the local Citizens' Council) about a rumored NAACP chapter. In the same meeting, the sheriff and police chief provided Van Landingham the names of preachers and other local Black leaders that might cause trouble down the road (Van Landingham 1959e). Such collusion and private action are defining features of this archival record.

Paul and the Freedom Riders

In the summer of 1961, a group of activists from around the country travelled to the South as part of a shift in the civil rights movement; the "Freedom Riders," so named for their attempts to integrate transit facilities, represented a shift towards direct action in a movement that had largely been defined in terms of legal action (Arsenault 2007). The Freedom Riders frequently found themselves imprisoned in the county jails and penitentiary farms of the Deep South, where they were able to connect with many of the southerners they wanted to help. Terry, one of these incarcerated riders, maintained a correspondence (Terry n.d.)¹ with a friend he had made in Mississippi's notorious state prison, Parchman, a Black man he knew as Paul:

Dear Paul,

I believe that I have told you all that is important enough for the time being, and if first efforts do not succeed, we are prepared to come again, only more stronger and determined next time. Do you get any money from relatives or friends? Let me know. We will send you a few bucks to help you out until you are released, then we can do more. Paul, these people think we are nothing but a bunch of bums, really they would be surprised who has been in their jail. Even you would be surprised. So be cool, things are coming your way.

Regards,
Terry

¹ The archival record of this letter does not contain a date or Terry's last name. A separate file from late September 1961 includes a list of Freedom Riders that were, at that time, being held in the maximum-security unit of Parchman. The first entry on the list is a probable candidate for the author of the above letter: "John Terry Sullivan, White Male, age 23, address: 6640 University Ave., Chicago, Illinois (Jew)" (Scarborough 1961c).

Paul's real name was Peter Hunter. He was fluent in French and Spanish and an ordained Baptist minister with degrees from universities in Texas and California who had once traveled in elite circles, attending high-profile NAACP meetings at churches in New York. He was also, in the words of Sovereignty Commission investigator Tom Scarbrough (1961a), "a three time loser for forgery." Scarbrough and Hunter spent an afternoon together in late July 1961 in a conference room at Parchman, where Hunter was serving a two-year prison sentence. Scarbrough left (1961a) that meeting convinced that "it is possible [Hunter] is wanting help to get out of Parchman," and he was right. Unbeknownst to Terry and the other Freedom Riders in Parchman that summer, Hunter was reporting on his interactions with them to the Sovereignty Commission. Hunter's job was to clean the Riders' cells and surreptitiously listen to their discussions, hoping to gather information on any ties to "subversive organizations." Hunter gradually garnered the trust of the activists, convincing them that he was interested in joining the Congress of Racial Equality once he was released from prison. Hunter proved to be "an ideal subject to con information out of people like the Freedom Riders" (Scarbrough 1961b). The opaquely three-way correspondence between the incarcerated Freedom Riders, Hunter, and Scarbrough was motivated by the Sovereignty Commission's larger concern that these "outside agitators" were ultimately aligned with ideological threats. Hunter passed along a note from Robert Rogers of New York that played into this fear, albeit not in the overt way that the Sovereignty Commission feared: "Listen, my friend [Paul], what is your definition for Communist? If Communist efforts can bring you freedom, then all your people should be Communists. Give me an answer to that" (Scarbrough 1961b).

For the most part, the Freedom Riders that Paul/Peter met in Parchman were less interested in communism than in his wellbeing; the letters that he turned over to the Commission included well-wishes, offers of financial support, and encouragement to take trips to Africa. Scarbrough was impressed with the intelligence that Hunter gathered and proposed paroling Hunter in recognition of his service, noting that he could be "of great service in exposing the crew who are responsible for these outside agitators coming to Mississippi and exposing their motives and subversive organizations which they are dedicated fellow travelers serving, in my opinion, the Communist cause" (Scarbrough 1961b). Hunter provided a fresh batch of letters later in October but lost the favor of Scarbrough and the administration when he tried to escape Parchman on October 25 after being given permission to leave the maximum-security unit to buy cigarettes. "Hunter proved," reflected Scarbrough (1961d), "as so many of his race have in the past, that they cannot be trusted, even when others are trying to help them."

Hunter's entanglement with the Freedom Riders and the Sovereignty Commission's investigators represents the delicate work of Mississippi's White elite in managing their interaction the "outside agitators" of the national civil rights movement. The "outside agitator" problem identified a larger tension in the state elite's attempt to maintain control over social space in the Mississippi Delta: the White power structure wanted to preserve their relative dominant position within Mississippi, but doing so in the face of a national movement required maintaining at least a façade of unity within the state and against the outsiders; that is, a major component of the Sovereignty Commission-Citizens' Council coalition was the delineation of a conceptual border that overlaid the state's geographic border. This ability to delineate and define geographic gradations of citizenship and permissible dissent represented a key feature of state power throughout the South (D'Arcus 2004), as language of the outside agitator was deployed repeatedly to undermine the bearers of unwelcome messages. The label "agitator" served to delegitimize protestors like the Freedom Riders because of a supposed dereliction of their duties as citizens; by not adhering to the norms and traditions of the space they entered, they had lost any right to critique before their protest even began. Rather than rely on the blunt instruments of the repressive state apparatus, the ideological state apparatus could be deployed to construct an ideology that neutralized contrary thought.

The logic of guilt-by-association was an important tool in delegitimizing activists working towards civil rights. That same week in 1962, Scarbrough arrived in Sunflower County to check in on five voter registration activists that were awaiting trial in Indianola. Among them was Bob Moses, who Scarbrough (1962c) noted with concern lived on the same block in New York as a communist newspaper. Scarbrough

returned to Sunflower County in August of 1963 to investigate the arrest of three more civil rights workers: one from Jackson, Mississippi, one from Summit, Mississippi, and Charles Cobb, a leader in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and a resident of Massachusetts. After escorting a group of local Black eligible voters to the courthouse to register, the three were told to leave since they were not “citizens” of Sunflower County. After refusing to leave, they were arrested and sentenced to thirty days in the county jail in Indianola (Scarborough 1963b).

The imagined reach of the outside agitators was expansive. While Scarborough spent much of his time in September 1962 investigating voter registration activities, he also filed a report related to a shooting in a Black neighborhood. Scarborough alleged in his report that between 8:30 and 9:00 PM on September 10, someone fired into three homes in Ruleville. The officials of Sunflower County were “quite sure” that no Whites had been involved, and instead advanced the theory that “outsider agitators” had manufactured the violence to incite further violence and federal intervention (Scarborough 1962d). Two young girls were injured in one of the shootings; Scarborough concluded that their injuries were slight enough to suggest they had only been accidentally injured in a staged shooting gone wrong. Scarborough’s other piece of evidence was the suspiciously prompt arrival of a CBS news crew from Chicago in Greenwood the next morning. The mayor of Ruleville had several activists, including Charles Cobb, arrested in order to prevent them from conducting an investigation into the shooting, but news of the attack quickly spread. “This is part of the overall picture to paint Mississippi in an unfavorable color to the rest of the nation,” Scarborough (1962d) wrote, “hoping to incite Federal authorities to intervene with Federal troops marching Negroes to the registrar’s office and qualifying them to vote.” He feared where the Black organizers’ plans would lead: “What Negroes really want is what is left of the white man’s rights” (Scarborough 1962d).

This antipathy towards alleged communists and the agents of the United States federal government highlights the extent to which Mississippi’s White elite were struggling to erect an imagined border that walled off the region from any and all outside critique. By attaching images of otherness to all civil rights activists, irrespective of their immediate goals or institutional affiliations, the Sovereignty Commission and the local White power structure could delegitimize such activism by building an ideological border around the state that determined who could and could not offer a valid critique of the local racial order. While the inevitable political successes that came to Mississippi led to a larger transformation of voter rights in the Delta, the specter of the outside agitator continues to be useful for conservative elites wary of social change. In the wake of George Floyd’s murder and subsequent protests in the summer of 2020, the Governor of Mississippi, Tate Reeves, drew a distinction between “legitimate protests” and those led by “anarchists and agitators from other parts of the country who seem committed to violence... usually spoiled kids who are privileged enough to not know the consequences” (Pettus 2020).

Rallying Allies

A scandal erupted at the Holiday Inn in Greenwood, Mississippi, in the fall of 1959. A young couple from Ohio had moved to town to manage the hotel’s restaurant and had promptly declared that they “were going to treat all the help alike and that the white waitresses would have to eat in the kitchen with the negro help” (Van Landingham 1959g). Several waitresses immediately quit. The ensuing tension escalated after a Black cook and White waitress had an argument in the kitchen. The waitress’s husband demand that the cook be arrested; otherwise, he would kill him himself. The cook was arrested, and the Ohio couple was summoned to a meeting with the mayor, city judge, county attorney, and sheriff where they were lectured on “southern customs.” The Holiday Inn management replaced them with someone who they thought “better understands the situation in Mississippi” (Van Landingham 1959g). The incident was brought to the attention of Sovereignty Commission investigator Zack Van Landingham by Robert Patterson, executive director the Citizens’ Councils (Van Landingham 1959g). While the task of officially investigating activists fell to the Sovereignty Commission, the Citizens’ Councils and the civic and business groups they represented were also active in developing the outside agitator narrative.

Formal collusion between the Commission and the Councils began early. In 1961, W.J. Simmons, president of the Citizens' Council's statewide organization, wrote to the Sovereignty Commission to outline a plan for a response to the Freedom Riders. Simmons (1961) claimed that the Councils had received hundreds of pieces of mail and long-distance phone calls in support of Mississippi's "swift and intelligent handling of the so-called 'freedom riders.'" Moving forward, the Councils, via their Citizens' Forum broadcasts, planned to launch an aggressive propaganda campaign to counter the narrative of outsider activists and their local collaborators (Simmons 1961). By July, the Councils were airing their counter messaging about the Freedom Riders on four hundred radio stations across the country with an estimated audience of ten to twenty million people (Walton 2009). The programs, which derided the Freedom Riders campaign as an "invasion of Mississippi," hewed to the narrative circulating within the Commission: these outsiders were communist infiltrators inciting racial tension for ulterior motives.

The Citizens' Councils were not only speaking to curious outsiders; they had responses in mind for the local elite. In November 1961, several months after the radio campaign, the Councils published a press release addressed to "whom it may concern" that praised the work of the Minute Men, groups of counter-protestors being organized in response to the work of SNCC and CORE. The release portrayed the Minute Men as a broad coalition of White leaders, much like the Councils themselves: "These 'Minute Men' organizations are made up of a cross section of the finest white citizenry in each community. They consist of bankers, lawyers, businessmen, farmers, and community leaders. Their purpose is to peacefully assemble on short notice at any given point within their community or county to demonstrate a citizens protest against any invasion of our institutions" (Patterson 1961).

In short, these were private groups of White people committed to maintaining ideological control by monitoring their neighbors. The Citizens' Councils proclaimed the Minute Men to be the peaceful response to unwanted outsiders, but the chain of events found within the Sovereignty Commission's own files tell a different story. By the end of 1966, the Minute Men had been infiltrated by the FBI over concerns of their militaristic behavior (Congressional Record 1967), had dozens of their members arrested for a series of planned bombings in New York (Jackson Daily News 1966), and saw their leader convicted of conspiracy and gun charges (Times-Picayune 1966).

Perpetual Surveillance

While the Sovereignty Commission directly surveilled 90,000 people during its two-decade history (Rowe-Sims and Pilcher 1999), the impacts of its surveillance would have been felt more broadly. The work of the Sovereignty Commission and the Citizens' Councils created a culture of perpetual surveillance and fear that clashed with desires to organize for change. The pervasive nature of the Sovereignty Commission's activity, notably its function as a secret police force for the state government and its liberal use of confidential informants, contributed to a feeling of pervasive monitoring of social and political life in the state. Later scholars have documented how ideological regimes can create this sort of panoptic surveillance that in turn serves to regulate behavior that contradicts that ideology; for example, the broad reach of evangelical Christianity in conservative states functions to monitor and restrict LGBTQ+ behavior, even when there are no state mechanisms to impose sanctions (Barton 2012). Constructing such a surveillance regime was particularly crucial for the ongoing success of Mississippi Delta as a de facto internal colony; as Sa'di (2012: 151) notes "as a form of governance, colonialism was interested in fixing the population socially and spatially, and surveying and documenting the changes in their lives."

A central feature of the surveillance work of the Sovereignty Commission and its allies was routine intelligence gathering on its established opponents like the NAACP, SNCC, and CORE. Early in its history, the Sovereignty Commission began to compile a list of known NAACP members, particularly those who frequently appeared in other Sovereignty Commission investigations. An internal memo stipulated that the NAACP did not know they were being surveilled: "We believe, beyond a doubt, that the NAACP has

absolutely no knowledge of the existence of this list and as a result they continue their activities more or less in the open and are thereby easier to keep track of” (DeCell 1958). The list was extensively and frequently updated. In May 1959, Roy Wilkins (executive secretary and later executive director of the NAACP) spoke at a meeting at the Black Masonic Temple in Jackson. Jackson police canvassed the neighborhood during the meeting and collected the car tag information of everyone in attendance, adding forty-three names to the list (Van Landingham 1959f). Van Landingham and the Sovereignty Commission’s investigations of the NAACP reached the grassroots level as well. In a visit to Bolivar and Sunflower Counties later that year, Van Landingham met with local police chiefs to update his information on a handful of Black residents that had already lost jobs due to their association with the NAACP.

The state government also spied on itself. In 1960, Charlie Bell, a Black man and former plantation worker from Sunflower, Mississippi applied for a job with the state’s Motor Vehicle Commission. His application caught the attention of Robert Patterson, the executive secretary of the Citizens’ Councils and resident of Greenwood. He wrote to the Director the Sovereignty Commission, Albert Jones, on Halloween with his concerns: “[Bell] has quite a bit of correspondence with 20th West 40th Street in New York which as you know, is the national headquarters of the NAACP. They may be planning a test case on this negro or something” (Patterson 1960). It is not clear how Patterson, a private citizen, knew about Bell’s application or mail correspondence, but he advised the Sovereignty Commission to conduct an investigation of their own. The investigation quickly concluded, as Bell had not, in fact, applied for a job with the state (Gaither 1960), but Bell proved to be an asset for the state in a different capacity by 1963. In October, Bell sent a lengthy, handwritten letter to the commissioner of the Public Welfare Department with information on Black bootleggers in the area. Bell was sharing this information with the hope that it would be useful to law enforcement. He also proposed that he be given a full-time job as an undercover informant for the Department and a state vehicle (Bell 1963). The Commissioner forwarded his letter to the director of the Sovereignty Commission, noting that Bell was “well known to member [sic] of the county welfare department staff there as a truthful and reliable elderly colored man with a good reputation” (Ross 1963). Director Johnston, in turn, notified Commission investigator Tom Scarbrough that he “might think it worthwhile to drive over there and see [Bell]” (Johnston 1963). The chain of events that began with Bell’s handwritten letter ended back in Sunflower, where Scarbrough and Sunflower County Sheriff Woodley Carr discussed the bootlegging activity mentioned in Bell’s letter and ways to leverage him as an (unpaid) informant (Scarbrough 1963c).

Charlie Bell was one of many private citizens that were targeted by the state’s surveillance regime. In April 1962, the Sovereignty Commission (1962) assigned Tom Scarbrough about a dozen names to investigate. Half were names taken from a notebook owned by civil rights activist Aaron Henry, while the rest were hospital managers at hospitals under investigation for their treatment of patients and personnel (Scarbrough 1962a; see Figure 1 for an image of this list). His investigations of these people were extensive—and invasive. About Elvira Johnson, the first name on his list, he learned the following: she was a “ginger cake colored Negro female,” an active member of her church, and owned her home at “lot #9, Block B, Section 16-14-7 in the City of Kosciusko.” Her husband was known as a “good Negro” with one arrest for public drunkenness. She had met Aaron Henry briefly at a church function (Scarbrough 1962b). Scarbrough gleaned this information from Johnson directly, alerting her to the reality that even a casual interaction with someone like Henry had made her an object of her neighbors’ surveillance.

In Attala County, a general rundown on Elvira Johnson, 715 North Jackson Street, Kosciusko, Miss., race unknown.

In Sunflower County, a general rundown on Brooks Gentry, 103 East Park Street, Drew, Miss., race unknown, and Gordon Harris, c/o State Penitentiary, Parchman, Miss., race unknown.

In Tallahatchie County, a general rundown on Dorothy Barrett, 201 West Tom Brown Street, Charleston, Miss., race unknown.

In Coahoma County, a general rundown on Mary Shannon, Davenport, Miss., race unknown; Rev. J. D. Ferguson, Route # 1, Box 307, Clarksdale, Miss., race unknown; Frank Thackston, Clarksdale, Miss., race unknown; Rabbi Irvin Schor, 410 Catalpa Street, Clarksdale, Miss., race unknown.

The above names were taken from a notebook belonging to Aaron Henry. It may be well, after securing information on the above subjects, that you contact these subjects regarding their association with Aaron Henry.

In Coahoma County, check with the manager of the Coahoma County Hospital, Clarksdale, Miss.

In Leflore County, check with the manager of the Greenwood Leflore Hospital, Greenwood, Miss.

In Sunflower County, check with the manager of the South Sunflower County Hospital, Indianola, Miss., and of the North Sunflower County Hospital, Ruleville, Miss.

The above hospitals are to be notified of probable investigations being made regarding their treatment of patients and the employment of personnel.

Secure a list of school teachers from the county and city school superintendents in the above counties.

Figure 1: List of citizens to investigate (Scarborough 1962a).

The case of Dewey Greene highlights the extent to which ostensibly routine attempts at normal civil life led to entanglement with Mississippi's surveillance program. On October 24, 1962, Greene wrote to his former principal at Broad Street High School in Greenwood to request that a copy of his transcript be sent to the registrar at the University of Mississippi (Greene 1962). Just six days later, Tom Scarborough was in Leflore and Sunflower Counties investigating Greene, a Black twenty-one-year-old seeking admission to the University just weeks after James Meredith became the first Black student there. When Scarborough arrived in Greenwood, the Mayor had already approached Greene's parents with the specter of a threat: Is "the boy's action not worrying [his father] and his mother?" (Scarborough 1962e). Scarborough was desperate to find something wrong with Greene. He checked the juvenile docket, the circuit court docket, and the county court docket to no avail. He inquired with local credit bureaus and banks to determine if Greene or his family had outstanding debts (they did not). Neither the sheriff nor Citizens' Council secretary Robert Patterson had anything to report. The president of Mississippi Vocational College (now Mississippi Valley State University), which Greene had attended for one semester, reported modest grades. The president's wife noted that Greene had the concerning habit of buying bus tickets to different Delta communities most weekends; she and her husband suspected he was attending voter registration meetings. At last, Scarborough

found something in Clarksdale: Greene had once been cited for a curfew violation and an expired car inspection sticker. “This is all I could find that Dewey Greene had been found guilty of,” Scarbrough (1962e) concluded, “However, I did determine that he is presently a racial agitator and more can be expected to be heard from Dewey Roosevelt Greene, Jr.” Six months later, Greene’s father Dewey Greene Sr. attempted to register to vote at the Leflore County courthouse; that night, a window in his home was shot out with a shotgun. Scarbrough (1963a) concluded that the “racial agitators would have the public believe that someone fired into Greene’s house because of the fact that he tried to register at the Court House this morning.” The extent of Scarbrough’s evidence that this was a false flag was that no one had been injured in the shooting.

Turning in the Neighbors

While investigators like Zack Van Landingham and Tom Scarbrough were responsible for the surveillance of the thousands of private citizens and dozens of organizations in their portfolios, they were aided by frequent collusion with private citizens and groups like the Citizens’ Councils. This collusion frequently resembled the concerns about the new chiropractor summarized in the introduction of this article: citizen spy craft motivated by circumstantial evidence. These collaborators proved to be eager partners. In early 1959, Robert Patterson (1959a), executive secretary of the Citizens’ Councils, wrote to Van Landingham shortly after their first meeting, noting “We are very anxious to cooperate with the efforts of the State Sovereignty Commission in any way possible.”

Van Landingham’s account of the meeting was similarly positive. He recounted a two-and-a-half-hour meeting with Patterson in which they discussed the location of suspected NAACP chapters across the state. Greenwood, Patterson’s home and base of operations, had not had much civil rights activity at this point in time; the sole “Negro Agitator,” a Dr. Lane, had already been run out of town. Van Landingham (1959a) confirmed Patterson’s sentiments, noting that “any information in [the Council’s] possession would immediately be made known to the State Sovereignty Commission upon request.” After meeting with Patterson, Van Landingham consulted with a typical list of sources: a bank president, the sheriff, and the city chief of police. The police chief confirmed the lack of NAACP organizing in town but shared with concern that an NAACP official had sent a fundraising letter to a Black Greenwood man. It is not clear how the police chief was able to monitor citizens’ mail at this level of detail (Van Landingham 1959a).

The understanding between the Citizens’ Councils and the Sovereignty Commission proved to be immediately fruitful. Just weeks after their first meeting, Van Landingham and Patterson were in communication about Horace Germany, a Black preacher in the Church of God tradition who had held interracial prayer meetings in east Mississippi (Patterson 1959b; Van Landingham 1959b). Germany, a White native of Neshoba County who trained as a Church of God preacher in Indiana, had attracted the attention of the Sovereignty Commission before. In 1956, the Mississippi Bureau of Investigation sent an investigator to east Mississippi to assess complaints that Germany was overly friendly with his black neighbors. The investigator summarized the allegations thusly: “it was the general talk of the town that Rev. Germany had negroes in his home and ate with them at his table and that he had been known to give a negro a registered Holstein calf for the negro 4-H club.” The informant acknowledged that he had never actually seen any such behavior, but that everyone seemed to know that this had all taken place (Cole 1956).

The 1959–1960 investigations were motivated by a more concrete concern among the white supremacist establishment: Germany had acquired a parcel of land in the country and apparently aimed to establish a small Church of God seminary for Black pastors. A lengthy report from early August 1960 confirmed the following: Germany owned a mid-sized dairy farm in Union County and had donated a portion of it to establish Bay Ridge Christian College, a Black-only seminary with an integrated Board of Trustees. The State of Mississippi had rejected an application for a charter for the college upon learning that the school would be a Black school, but Germany and his colleagues had still enrolled six students from Louisiana and Alabama, all Black men in their late teens. The students worked part time on the dairy farm in exchange for

tuition, lodging, meals, clothing, and transportation to revivals or other church events. Germany was aware of complaints made by the Whites in Union County but made no apologies for his actions, insisting that he was performing legitimate missionary work in line with Christian teaching. While Bay Ridge was neither chartered nor accredited, Germany had made arrangements with seminaries in Houston and Indiana to ensure that any credits granted in the interim could be transferred there. Germany handled the investigation adroitly, asking careful questions about the authority under which he was being investigated and keeping careful notes of his own (Hopkins 1960a).

By the end of August, the Sovereignty Commission's investigations had alerted most of Union County to Germany's actions. The investigations included the sheriff and local police chiefs. Hopkins, the Commission's investigator in the case, testified about his investigations before a grand jury in the county. The state government ultimately found little worth pursuing in this case; as long as Germany did not attempt to transfer course credits and represent Bay Ridge as an accredited institution, he was outside of their purview. Hopkins's final investigation into the Bay Ridge affair took place on August 26, 1960. He and the sheriff were unable to contact Germany or his associates, and Hopkins returned to Jackson (Hopkins 1960b).

This Sovereignty Commission record omits what had happened to Germany earlier that day aside from an oblique mention that he was in the hospital in Meridian. Dozens of members of the local Ku Klux Klan ambushed him and beat him to the point of unconsciousness. Believing that he had died, the Klan members attempted to set his truck on fire with him inside, assuming that no one would investigate his death. Germany regained consciousness and was able to drive to safety (Germany 2000). Despite letters in support from a (pro-segregation) neighbor (Draper 1960) and the Chair of the Church of God's general assembly (Boyer 1960), the Sovereignty Commission continued to insist that the issue with Germany's work was one of improper paperwork. Germany ultimately left Mississippi, taking Bay Ridge Christian College with him to Houston, Texas, where it still operates today as an unaccredited junior college. This case is illustrative of the ways in which collaboration between the state's Sovereignty Commission and everyday White citizens unfolded. A general tip from Robert Patterson prompted an investigation into a small Pentecostal school hundreds of miles away. A month of investigations yielded no serious legal concerns about the school but attracted the attention of nearly every White citizen in Union County. An attempted assassination, never investigated, drove the church school out of town and had a chilling effect on future missionaries, many of whom felt the need to explicitly distance themselves from Germany's beliefs (Scarborough and Downing 1960). Thus, the nascent ideological state apparatus succeeded in suppressing competing institutions in both the religious and educational space.

Conclusion and Implications

The neighborhood surveillance described here represents an ideological successor to the blatant violence of the repressive Jim Crow regime. In its extremes, of course, this surveillance apparatus exerted its influence over the bodies of everyday Mississippians in violent ways. In October of 1965 more than 250 civil rights demonstrators were arrested in Natchez and taken to the state penitentiary at Parchman, more than 200 miles away. The demonstrators were stripped and provided with pairs of shorts and forced to drink milk of magnesia, a laxative. They were then crammed into maximum security cells without toilet paper or enough mattresses. Moreover, inmates complained that the only water available for consumption was the water in the toilet. Prison officials insisted that the milk of magnesia was administered to prevent the spread of "colds, flus, and other diseases" and that toilet paper was, in fact, provided, as demonstrated by the inmates who had used toilet paper rolls as pillows in place of a mattress. The prison denied in toto the accusations of neglect, while also noting that they had been properly punished for the crime of "parading after the court had enjoined them of doing so" (Scarborough 1965). As Althusser (2006) notes, even the ideological state apparatus can make use of repression and violence.

The spatial stagnation of the Delta has prevented major restructuring of both the social and economic space of the region, allowing for stagnation in a failing colony. As a historical era, the two decades of the Sovereignty Commission's influence over Mississippi reverberate to the present. A central consequence of the Sovereignty Commission's collusion with the Citizens' Councils was the gradual transfer of control over racial supremacy from the de jure policies of the state government to the de facto workings of civic groups, businesses, and local governments. This process resulted in a parallel set of institutions that reflected the same ideological apparatus previously operated by the formal state. The work of the Commission, particularly its propaganda work, also sharpened the boundaries (both geographic and socio-political) between Mississippi and the rest of the country. In doing so, the state's elite sought to shield itself from criticism and created a conceptual tool that continues to find use in anti-civil rights rhetoric. The Commission created a climate of fear that inhibited organizing within Black communities that had already been excluded from mainstream institutions. The work of the Commission and the Citizens' Councils thus had a fundamental role in shaping the social, economic, and political contexts in which social mobility happens (or does not happen). Institutions that facilitate mobility were kept out of Black control (even where a Black electoral majority was present) for decades until the White minority was able to create its own parallel systems. This process was most pronounced in the public school systems. Fear of integration motivated the Commission, and it worked with the Councils to delay the implementation of integration long enough to allow a crop of private "segregation academies" to emerge in Black-majority communities. While the Commission was dissolved by the late 1970s, the trend of declining support for public education and the persistence of segregation academies continue to shape the foundations of ideology in the Mississippi Delta. The fundamental undermining of education in this context reflects the extent to which all ideological apparatuses were invested with the interests of the state's elites.

The case described here advances of a theory of neighborly surveillance—surveillance between and amongst private citizens enacted outside the purview of the formal state but in the interest of the elites who control the state—that merges conceptions of the ideological state apparatus with the relations of production embedded in the internal colony. Accordingly, it provokes conversations about cases beyond Mississippi. The modes of extraction and exploitation that characterize the Deep South of the United States are founded in capitalist contexts worldwide, and in most cases rely on racial or other forms of social division to generate the ideological machinery that ensures their reproduction. Thus, attention to the role of everyday surveillance in chilling dissent is an important analytic tool for assessing the possibilities for progress in post-colonial and post-authoritarian spaces.

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