“Old Chapel” (Croft Institute for International Studies)

1) BACKGROUND:

Built in 1853, this building, which is now home to the Croft Institute for International Studies, was originally a dormitory. It was later changed into a hall for student assemblies and various ceremonies and became known as “The Old Chapel.” During the Civil War, the building was used as a hospital to treat the wounded from the Battle of Shiloh over 100 miles away in Tennessee.

We know that this building was constructed with enslaved labor. The year of its construction, 1853, makes that a near inevitability. Further, we have documented evidence within the University of Mississippi’s Board of Trustees minutes from the 1850s in which they discuss payment to the slaveholders who had leased their enslaved to the university for construction projects.\(^1\) One of those slaveholders was Robert Sheegog. Sheegog’s house, built in 1848, would be purchased in 1930 by William Faulkner who would rename it Rowan Oak. Therefore, Rowan Oak might have been built by some of the same enslaved people who built the first buildings of the University of Mississippi. While Faulkner does not directly address enslaved labor in these stories, he does touch on it in “Barn Burning.” Abner Snopes tells his son, “That’s sweat. N***** sweat. Maybe it ain’t white enough yet to suit him. Maybe he wants to mix some white sweat with it.”\(^2\) This statement is made in reference to Major DeSpain’s house in the story and there is a great deal to unpack in those few lines. However, it demonstrates Faulkner’s contemplation and recognition of African American enslaved labor in Mississippi. Taking that into context, it is imperative to read the plaque that stands next to “The Old Chapel” describing the University of Mississippi’s enslaved laborers.

What makes “The Old Chapel” so unique is that there is actual tangible evidence of the enslaved who toiled to construct the building. If you are standing on the Lyceum Circle side of the building, count three windows from the left, and go look underneath the white windowsill. What you will see are three small fingerprints made by an enslaved laborer in the brick. They most likely come from a child whose job was to mold the bricks. Simply put, this would have been done by placing the clay in a mold and then knocking it out before sending it off to be fired. However, sometimes the brick would get stuck and they would have to stick their fingers in to pull it out which is what left these fingerprints.

2) PROMPTS:

i) Consider what it means for local slaveholders to “rent” the enslaved to the university. Historian Edward Baptist writes, “If one enslaved person heard a white man and a woman in the house ‘talking about money,’ everybody in the quarters understood that

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1 Board of Trustee Reports and Minutes (MUM00524). The Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.
‘money’ meant ‘slaves,’ and that ‘slaves’ were about to be turned into ‘money.’”

What do you think that means? Might it remind you of the way we talk about some things today?

ii) Consider William Faulkner’s famous line, “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.” Does that line take on any deeper meaning as you place your fingers into the fingerprints of an enslaved child from 165 years ago that have, quite literally, been frozen in time? Further, then-candidate Barack Obama used this line from Faulkner in a 2008 speech he delivered on race. Why do you think he might have used that line and what sort of connection might there be to this building?

iii) Finally, what questions do you have? The word history comes from the ancient Greek word for inquiry, so as we learn then more questions arise. Having learned about the history of slavery at the university what questions have come into your mind that might help guide us as we seek to learn more.

3) FURTHER INFORMATION:
   a) The University of Mississippi Slavery Research Group is the best resource for information regarding the history of slavery at the university. Their website is: https://slaveryresearchgroup.olemiss.edu/
   b) Fingerprints on Croft:

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BARR AND FALKNER HALLS

1) BACKGROUND:

Barr and Falkner Halls were both constructed in 1929 to serve as dormitories. They were named after Hugh A. Barr (1816-1899), a prominent Oxford attorney, and John Wesley Thompson Falkner (1848-1922), William’s paternal grandfather who had been a state senator and served on the university’s Board of Trustees from 1902 to 1908. These buildings are positioned right next to one another and that positioning gives us a unique opportunity to a central figure in William Faulkner’s world. Her name was Caroline Barr and she was a bridge between these two families.

Caroline Barr, known as “Mammy Callie,” was one of the most important figures in Faulkner’s life. She came to work as a domestic for the Falkner family when William was about eight years old. When he purchased Rowan Oak in 1930, she came back to work for him and Estelle to help with their young daughter Jill. When she passed away in 1940, Faulkner held a private funeral service for her in the parlor at Rowan Oak and paid for her burial plot and headstone in Oxford Cemetery. In 1942, Faulkner dedicated his book Go Down Moses to her and she was the basis upon which he created the Compson family’s domestic, Dilsey, in The Sound and the Fury who stands as one of his most famous figures.

Caroline Barr had been born enslaved in Mississippi in approximately 1850, although there is debate surrounding the year and location of her birth. What is known is that she was enslaved by the Barr family for whom Barr Hall is named. Faulkner wrote in a letter that she had been born on the plantation of Samuel Barr and then was brought to his brother’s household at some point this being Hugh A. Barr. Faulkner had probably gathered information from stories of slavery times which Caroline would tell to him and his brothers as young children.

These stories that Caroline would tell certainly had a profound impact on Faulkner and he almost certainly would have drawn from them in his writing. Further, Caroline would take young William with her on excursions to visit her family and friends in Freedmen’s Town, which was the prominent African American community just west of the square. Again, these visits and experiences would be the inspiration for the way in which Faulkner populated Yoknapatawpha County and the town of Jefferson in terms of portraying African American life.

2) PROMPTS:

a) You have the newspaper article from the Feb 5, 1940 Memphis Commercial Appeal which has a report on the funeral for Caroline Barr. The headline reads, “Rites held for former slave in novelist Faulkner’s home.” What do you think it means that her name is

1 Interestingly, Howry Hall which sits alongside these two buildings in a block was named after Judge Charles B. Howry who had been J.W.T Falkner’s law partner in Oxford before ascending to the bench. Joel Williamson’s book, William Faulkner and Southern History, goes into greater detail regarding Falkner and Howry.
2 John Faulkner, My Brother Bill: An Affectionate Remembrance (New York: Pocket Books, 1963), 44.
not given in the headline? Do you see any correlation between that and the fact that we have very little records for her?

b) The newspaper reports that following the service at Rowan Oak, there was a second service at the “negro Baptist Church” (now Second Baptist Church on Jackson Ave). What does it mean that the service in her home church was held after the private service at Rowan Oak? Why might Faulkner have made this decision?

c) At the bottom of the article is an advertisement for the film *Gone With the Wind* which features a prominent “mammy” character. If you have read the book or seen the film, does a real person like Caroline Barr change your perspective? How might one compare and contrast the South as portrayed by Faulkner and in *Gone With the Wind*?

d) What questions do you have? Having learned a little about Caroline Barr and the Barr and Falkner families, does that raise any questions in your mind?

3) **Supplemental Materials:**

a) Caroline Barr and Jill Faulkner:

b) *Memphis Commercial Appeal* February 5, 1950:
Rites Held For Former Slave
In Novelist Faulkner’s Home

OXFORD, Miss., Feb. 4.—The body of “Mammy Callie,” 100-year-old former slave, lay in state in the “Big House” today as William Faulkner, the novelist, paid tribute to the old woman, who had been in the employ of his family for nearly 50 years. White friends of “Mammy” attended the private rites held in the drawing room of Mr. Faulkner’s ante bellum residence this morning.

In his tribute, Mr. Faulkner said: “As oldest of my father’s family, I might be called here master. That situation never existed between “Mammy” and me. She reared all of us from childhood. She stood as a fountain not only of authority and information, but of affection, respect and security. She was one of my first associates. I have known her all my life and have been privileged to see her out of ours.

“She was a character of devotion and fidelity. Mammy made no demands on any one. She had the handicap to be born without money and with a black skin and at a bad time in this country. She asked no odds and accepted the handicaps of her lot, making the best of her few advantages. She surrendered her destiny to a family. That family accepted and made some appreciation of it. She was paid for the devotion she gave but still that is only money. As surely as there is a heaven, Mammy will be in it.”

Following the tribute by Mr. Faulkner, a group of negroes sang spirituals while “Mammy Callie’s” white friends stood in respect to the century old exslave who exerted unquestioned authority over most children in her neighborhood. Immediately after the rites at the Faulkner residence, the body was taken to the negro Baptist Church for funeral services.

“Mammy Callie” was buried this afternoon in St. Peter’s Cemetery. Mr. and Mrs. Faulkner attended the church services and were present at the burial.

Born in 1840 in Pontotoc County, she was christened Caroline Barr. She remained on the Barr plantation until after the Confederate surrender when she moved to Oxford in the employ of the late Colonel Barr. One day she came to the residence of the late Murray C. Faulkner. She “adopted” the family and had lived with them since. She was in good health until last week when she suffered a stroke. She died in her cabin on the William Faulkner place.

LOEW’S
SEE IT TODAY!
GONE WITH THE WIND

Weekday matinees are continuous—not reserved. Come anytime from 10 a.m. up to 2:45 and see a complete performance. Doors open 9 A.M. Only night shows and Sunday matinees are reserved.

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 Except Loges
Matinees 2 p.m. (reserved) $1.20 incl. tax
Except Loges
Weekday Matinees (not reserved) $1.00 incl. tax
Except Loges

See it in its entirety, exactly the same as Adams & B’way presentation! THIS PRODUCTION WILL NOT BE SHOWN ANYWHERE EXCEPT AT ADVANCED PRICES—AT LEAST UNTIL 1941.
1. BACKGROUND:
Burns United Methodist Church was the first African American church in Oxford founded in 1867. It was built on land given to a former enslaved man, Harrison Stearns, by his former owner and the first law professor at the University of Mississippi, William Forbes Stearns. The first church was a small wood frame building that was known as the “Colored Church at Oxford” and was announced in the *Oxford Falcon* newspaper.¹ Its first minister, Alexander Phillips, was also an active member of the Republican Party during Reconstruction and an educator.
In 1910, the congregation had grown significantly along with the African American community and they were able to build the structure that still stands today. This church housed the congregation until they moved in the mid-1970s to a new location on Molly Barr Rd where they had constructed a new building with classrooms for Sunday school and other educational endeavors. Therefore, the church was left abandoned until the early 1990s when author John Grisham purchased the building. Grisham later moved to Virginia, but the local groups of the Oxford Lafayette County Heritage Foundation and the Oxford Development Association, a civil rights group, partnered together and convinced Grisham to donate the building for preservation. Today, the church has been converted into a museum for African American history here in Oxford, MS.
As an institution, the church is central to African American communities across the country and the South. As historian Michael Vinson Williams writes, “The church has always been the center of African American social movement. Whether used as meeting places for strategizing or places for spiritual recuperation, the church and African American religious services played a vital role in the struggle for social change and educating upcoming generations on their social responsibilities.”² Therefore, it is significant that this church building now serves as a museum to educate visitors about African American history here in Oxford and Lafayette County.
William Faulkner would have known this church well. In fact, there are stories of him even attending services at Burns although there is no documentation. It is believed that he attended services at another African American church, Second Baptist, which is just a block away from Burns. Second Baptist was Caroline Barr’s home church and she would have been the one to have taken him there.
Regardless, in order to understand the world of William Faulkner it is important to understand the history of Oxford and its community. The Burns-Belfry Museum offers a unique opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of African American history in

¹ Alexander Phillips, “Colored Church,” *Oxford Falcon* (Oxford, MS), May 9, 1868. Department of Archives and Special Collections, Box 32, 1868-1869.
Oxford. It also gives an excellent overview of African American history in a more national context covering four main focal points: Enslavement, Emancipation, Jim Crow, and Civil Rights.

2. PROMPTS:
   a) How does learning about African American history help in your understanding of William Faulkner’s stories?
   b) Consider how the physical landscape has changed around the church from William Faulkner’s time? The area where it stands was known as Freedmen’s Town (there is a historical marker at the corner of MLK Dr. and Jackson Ave). This was a once prominent middle class African American community as evidenced by the fact that they were able to build such a beautiful church. In particular, look across the street from the church and note what is located there today.

3. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:
   a) The museum is open Wed-Fri 12-3 and Sun 1-4. In addition, if you would like to schedule a class visit you can contact me at ghmcdan1@go.olemiss.edu (for now, but I will update if and when it changes) or Hannah Rhodes, who is the new Head Docent, at hzrhodes@go.olemiss.edu and we will do our best to accommodate.
   b) Also, students may be interested in visiting the L.Q.C. Lamar House Museum as well. While not directly linked to William Faulkner, his mother grew up near the home and was friends with one of Lamar’s daughters. It gives an excellent overview of 19th century history in Oxford and Lafayette County in relation to one of Mississippi’s most prominent historical figures with whom Faulkner would have been well aware.
CAROLINE BARR’S GRAVE

1) BACKGROUND:
Caroline Barr, known as “Mammy Callie,” was one of the most important figures in Faulkner’s life. She came to work as a domestic for the Falkner family when William was about eight years old. When he purchased Rowan Oak in 1930, she came back to work for him and Estelle to help with their young daughter Jill. When she passed away in 1940, Faulkner held a private funeral service for her in the parlor at Rowan Oak and paid for her burial plot and headstone in Oxford Cemetery. In 1942, Faulkner dedicated his book *Go Down Moses* to her and she was the basis upon which he created the Compson family’s domestic, Dilsey, in *The Sound and the Fury* who stands as one of his most famous figures.
Caroline Barr had been born enslaved in Mississippi in approximately 1850, although there is debate surrounding the year and location of her birth. What is known is that she was enslaved by the Barr family for whom Barr Hall is named. Faulkner wrote in a letter that she had been born on the plantation of Samuel Barr and then was brought to his brother’s household at some point this being Hugh A. Barr. Faulkner had probably gathered information from stories of slavery times which Caroline would tell to him and his brothers as young children.¹
These stories that Caroline would tell certainly had a profound impact on Faulkner and he almost certainly would have drawn from them in his writing. Further, Caroline would take young William with her on excursions to visit her family and friends in Freedmen’s Town, which was the prominent African American community just west of the square. Again, these visits and experiences would be the inspiration for the way in which Faulkner populated Yoknapatawpha County and the town of Jefferson in terms of portraying African American life.

2) PROMPTS:
a) Caroline Barr’s grave is located in the same cemetery as William Faulkner’s. If you are in the old section of the cemetery (up the hill from Faulkner’s grave) there is a cedar grove near the center. Standing at that cedar grove take the paved path that extends out to the right and leading to the mausoleum. About halfway down that path and just off of it there is an obelisk (a stone pillar that looks like a miniature Washington Monument). Just a few feet from that obelisk is a small grave sitting by itself with a small square headstone with the name Callie Barr Clark. This is her grave which was paid for by William Faulkner. The headstone reads:

Callie Barr Clark
1840-1940
“Mammy”
Her white children bless her

b) First of all, the section of the cemetery where she is buried was the historic African American section. Therefore, even in death there was segregation during Jim Crow. Consider that fact and what might the implications of it be?

c) The inscription on her headstone reads, “Her white children bless her.” Why do you think William Faulkner chose that statement? Do you see that as problematic? If so, why?
CALLIE BARR CLARK
1840—1940
"MAMMY"
Her white children bless her.
LYNCHING

1) BACKGROUND:

William Faulkner’s “Dry September” centers on the lynching of Will Mayes. The actual event is not described in detail, but it is inferred. In the first sentence, Faulkner describes the twilight of September as “bloody.”[1] Tragically, lynching was a violent part of Southern history in the late-nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth centuries. In fact, one of the lynchings that occurred here in Oxford, MS took place when Faulkner was 10 years old. I have included below two historians accounts of that lynching, Nelse Patton, and they also provide greater context for lynching in Southern history. The first is from Don Doyle’s book *Faulkner’s County: The Historical Roots of Yoknapatawpha*.2 The second is from Joel Williamson’s book *William Faulkner and Southern History*.3 Finally, a local group has been working with the descendants of Elwood Higginbottom who was the last documented lynching victim in Lafayette County. They have been working with Bryan Stevenson’s Equal Justice Initiative and its National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery for the creation of a lynching memorial to hang at the site in Montgomery and to be placed at the site of Higginbottom’s death. Therefore, I have also included historian Darren Grem’s text regarding this event and a list of all 7 lynching victims in Lafayette County.

2) LYNCHING OF ELWOOD HIGGINBOTTOM:

On the evening of September 17, 1935, Elwood Higginbottom, a 28-year old African American tenant farmer, husband, and father to three children, was in custody in the Oxford jail. He was accused of murdering local landholder Glen Roberts. Four months earlier, Roberts had led a posse to Higginbottom’s house over a property dispute. Higginbottom allegedly shot Roberts to death, likely in self-defense, and later fled. After Roberts’s funeral, “citizens of Oxford and the county joined with officers of [Lafayette] and other counties” in a manhunt. They beat Higginbottom’s sister and threatened burning his brothers to death in retaliation. Captured a few days later in Pontotoc County, Higginbottom was held in Jackson until his trial date in Oxford. With anger mounting that a guilty verdict was not forthcoming quickly enough, a mob of 50-150 white men gathered outside the jail. They broke in and drove Higginbottom to a wooded area near this location, the Three-Way on Old Russell Road. Higginbottom fought for his life, but the mob forced a rope around his neck and hung him to death. Reports described five bullet holes in his body. The lynching sparked outrage from the NAACP, which wrote to Franklin D. Roosevelt and blamed Higginbottom’s death on ‘callous indifference’ toward federal or state protections against ‘anarchic mobs.’ Roosevelt’s administration did not respond. Officials in Mississippi charged no one. –Written by Darren Grem, Associate Professor of History and Southern Studies at University of Mississippi

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3) LAFAYETTE COUNTY MISSISSIPPI LYNCHING VICTIMS (DOCUMENTED BY THE EQUAL JUSTICE INITIATIVE)4
   a) Harris Tunstal (may be Harrison Tunstall)
      Date of Lynching: July 12, 1885 5:30pm (hanged) (25 years old)
      Location: Oxford, near public square
   b) Will McGregory (William)
      Date of Lynching: November, 13, 1890
      Location: Orrwood, Lafayette County
   c) Unnamed Man
      Date of Lynching: September 2, 1891 (hanged)
      Location: Oxford, MS
   d) William Chandler (or Candler)
      Date of Lynching: June 18, 1895
      Location: Abbeville, MS
   e) William Steen (Will Steen, Will Steele)
      Date of Lynching: July 30, 1893
      Location: Paris, Lafayette County
   f) Lawson Patton (aka Nib or Nelse Patton)
      Date of Lynching: September 8, 1908
      Location: Oxford, taken from the jail
   g) Elwood Higginbotham (Higginbottom)
      Date of Lynching: September 7, 1935 (28 years old)
      Location: Oxford, off North Lamar at Three-Way (taken from jail)
      Accusation: Murder of a white man (Glen Roberts on Woodson Ridge)
      Sources: extensive, see committee’s files in Dropbox, available on request

4) PROMPTS:
   a) Why is it important to talk about and understand lynching as a part of Southern history?
   b) In his short story, “Dry September,” Faulkner does not describe the actual lynching but rather infers its occurrence. Why might he have made this decision?
   c) Finally, the memorial to Elwood Higginbottom and the 6 other lynching victims will be placed at the site of his lynching near the Three-Way (Molly Barr Rd and North Lamar Blvd) in October. There will be a public ceremony for its placement and I will follow up as details are made available. This will be something worth attending, but if not the memorial will be there to visit afterwards.

5) FURTHER RESOURCES:
   a) EQUAL JUSTICE INITIATIVE:  https://museumandmemorial.eji.org/
   b) VIDEO FOR THE NATIONAL MEMORIAL FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE:  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tv7njmj239c

4 Tolnay/Beck Database and Confirmation Sheets (now CSDE Database), ““This inventory was constructed when Prof. Beck and Prof. Tolnay were both faculty of the University of Georgia’s Department of Sociology, in the late 1980s, and early 1990s. It began with lists of Lynchings published by the Chicago Tribune, the NAACP, and the Tuskegee Institute during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Each reported incident was then confirmed by newspaper reports. Additional incidents that met with the NAACP definition of lynching that were discovered during this progress were also added to the inventory.” [now known as the CSDE (Center for Studies in Demography and Ecology) at the University of Washington] http://lynching.csde.washington.edu/#/home
the citizens of Indianola, Mississippi. “A vote for Vardaman is a vote for White Supremacy,” his campaign advised, “a vote for the quelling of the arrogant spirit that has been aroused in the blacks by Roosevelt and his henchmen, a vote for the better education of white children, a vote for the safety of the Home and the protection of our women and children.” Vardaman openly supported lynchings, promising that if he were a private citizen and a “negro fiend” (rapist) had been apprehended, he would “head the mob to string the brute up,” and, he added, “I haven’t much respect for a white man who wouldn’t.” Education for blacks, Vardaman argued, would only “spoil a good field hand and make an insolent cook.” While governor, he eliminated the small budget allocated to the state Negro Normal School attached to Rust University in Holly Springs. Vardaman justified this by arguing that education for the Negro only serves to “sharpen his cunning, breeds hopes that cannot be fulfilled, inspires aspirations that cannot be gratified, creates an inclination to avoid honest labor, promotes indolence and in turn leads to crime.” The legislature gave up any hopes of overriding the governor’s will.66 He advocated repeal of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution and openly rejected the concept of equality between the races. The Negro, he argued, was “a lazy, lying, lustful animal which no conceivable amount of training can transform into a tolerable citizen.”67

Racial politics were hardly new in Mississippi, but never had the state witnessed an aspirant to public office willing to voice such blatant racist rhetoric. Vardaman’s appeal to white supremacy and his demonization of blacks constituted a “permission to hate” extended from the highest office in the state. In his racism, Vardaman was surpassed only by his disciple, Theodore “The Man” Bilbo, elected as governor in 1916 and again in 1928. Bilbo dominated Mississippi politics with a strangely appealing combination of rascality and racism. “Biblonic plague,” as some called it, enlarged upon the Vardaman tradition of Negrophobia with appeals to anti-Semitism and proposals for deportation of blacks to Africa.68

September Lynching

Vardaman and Bilbo did not initiate the “dark journey” blacks would endure in Mississippi, but their regimes encouraged drastic hardening of race relations. The most palpable expression of this was a tightening system of law and custom regulating segregation of the races, but physical separation was the least of the problems Mississippi blacks faced now. Indeed, many blacks might have wished for more segregation if only to protect themselves from the violence and insults whites inflicted on their race. In both the quantity
and the quality of their brutality, white Mississippians led the South in the wave of savagery that rose between Reconstruction and World War I.69

The new strain of racism that emanated from Vardaman, Bilbo, and their agrarian followers dwelled on the Negro’s capacity for evil of all kinds, but most particularly on the black male’s instinctive lust for white women. Vardaman always offered the most exalted praise of southern white womanhood, which he imbued with particular moral virtue and sexual purity. The natural passions of all men might endanger their chastity, but lust gave in to animalistic licentiousness in black males, Vardaman warned. Left unprotected, all white women stood in danger, and unless subject to the terror of lynch law, black males would molest and rape them. This thinking was common throughout much of the Deep South, but it took an especially mean turn in Mississippi.70

Lynchings were often elaborate public events, at times hideous rituals of prolonged torture and mutilation. They were typically conducted in broad daylight, sometimes announced in advance, and often attended by large crowds, which on occasion included women and children. The leaders of lynch parties were often well-known, respected members of the community, not poor white rednecks, though they may have been members of the mob. Often the victim of lynching had already been apprehended by legal authorities, imprisoned in a local jail, facing what was almost certain to be a swift trial, conviction by an all-white jury, and with the sentence almost assuredly to be death by hanging. Lynching denied the victim the dignity of a legal process intended to acknowledge his equality under the law and his citizenship as a member of the civic community.

The incidences of lynching in Mississippi became so common that many seem to have barely rated notice. Newspaper accounts, often the only source that identified lynchings, were sometimes remarkably scanty in their treatment of these events. “Four negroes were lynched in Grenada last week;” one brief entry in an 1885 newspaper reported, “also one at Oxford.”71 A careful gleaning of Mississippi’s newspapers reveals reports on ten lynchings in Lafayette County (along with four legal hangings) between 1865 and 1935. The accounts are incomplete and sometimes do not even name the person lynched or the victims of his crime. All but one of those lynched were reported to be black males. Most were accused of rape, murder, or assault, usually with a white female identified as victim. There were several lynchings in remote parts of the county that apparently went unreported. Two black men near Paris, in the notoriously violent southeast corner of the county, were lynched after being accused of peeping into the windows of white houses. “Their relatives refused to come cut them down,” according to one account, “because negroes were not allowed in Paris.”72
The lynching of Nelse Patton took place in September 1908. "Dry September," as Faulkner called it in his short story of that title, seemed to be a favorite month for lynching. It was just before gathering time when accounts were due and an enormous burst of labor required. Nelse Patton had been in trouble with the law frequently, usually for "retailing," meaning bootlegging illegal liquor. The previous September Patton had been arraigned three times for bootlegging, each time represented by attorney William V. Sullivan, a prominent Oxford attorney who had served as U.S. senator.73

The next fall, Patton was serving a sentence for another conviction of bootlegging and was allowed to serve his sentence out of jail as a trustee. As one of his duties Patton was sent to deliver a written message from a jail inmate, a white man named McMillan, to his wife, Mattie. McMillan was from another county and was serving a term for a federal offense. Mattie McMillan and their three children, one a daughter of seventeen and two very young ones, had moved in with another family in a house about a mile north of town so she could be near her husband. Since McMillan's sentence in June, Patton had delivered numerous messages to Mattie McMillan without incident, but this time something terrible happened.

Apparently Patton showed up at the house drunk. By one account he entered the house without knocking and took a seat. "Seeing the woman apparently alone and without protection," the report in one newspaper said, "his animal passion was aroused and he made insulting remarks to her." Mattie McMillan ordered him from the house, they shouted angrily at each other, then she went for a pistol in a bureau drawer. He rushed her from behind, grabbed her, and slashed her throat from ear to ear with a razor blade he carried in his back pocket. She ran from the house spewing blood, trying no doubt to scream but unable to make any sound through her lacerated throat. When they found her dead some seventy-five yards from the house her head was nearly severed from her neck. Meanwhile the seventeen-year old daughter rushed into the house, Patton grabbed her, but she managed to escape and ran to her mother, who lay dead outside. Newspaper reporters speculated it was the young girl Patton was after, and he had killed the mother just to have his way with the daughter.74 But Patton fled the scene.

A citizen posse quickly formed to chase down the killer. Nelse Patton was on the run. He could hear behind him men shouting, guns shooting, and dogs barking. He fled three or four miles through the fields, over fences, and through briars, all the time hearing hundreds of gunshots behind him fired by the oncoming posse. John Cullen, a white boy of fourteen, had heard the alarm and, armed with his shotgun, he saw the large black man running
for his life crossing the railroad tracks. Cullen and his brother ran after him and followed him into a vine-covered ditch leading into Toby Tubby Bottom, a creek valley north of town. Patton threatened the boy with his razor, still covered with Mattie McMillan's blood. Patton then broke and tried to run past the boy, but young John Cullen raised his shotgun and blasted him in the back. When Patton kept running, Cullen let go with another barrel. The second shot finally stopped Patton, and Sheriff J. G. Hartsfield and his posse brought him on horseback to the jail. "The negro presented a bestial appearance when being brought through the streets," the newspaper reported. "He was bloody from his wounds and unsteady in the saddle, either from whisky or the effects of his wounds... His copper-colored skin shone in the sunlight with great red splotches of blood." The prisoner was locked up in the county jail.

By half-past eight that evening a crowd of about one hundred "men and boys" formed and headed toward the jail. At the jail Judge W. A. Roane, a respected and popular jurist, stood before the mob and spoke bravely for justice and decency. He pleaded with the men to let the legal system take its course, promising there would be a speedy trial the following Monday, where he would preside. Mob rule would only bring shame on the community, Judge Roane implored. Sheriff Hartsfield and other county officials also spoke for law and order that evening. With other lynch mobs, a show of legal authority, an appeal to Christian compassion, or to local pride and decency could often turn a crowd back home, but not this night.

Following these pleas, none other than Mississippi's former U.S. senator William V. Sullivan, Patton's erstwhile champion in court, rose before the mob and inflamed the men to do their duty. Senator Sullivan later boasted to a newspaper reporter: "I led the mob which lynched Nelse Patton and I am proud of it. I directed every movement of the mob, and I did everything I could to see that he was lynched."

The mob surged forward, now determined to enter and pull Nelse Patton out of the jail, out of the legal system that was surely going to sentence him to death, and out of the civic community that, by law, granted him basic human rights. The point of this lynching was not only to punish Nelse Patton, it was to show that this man's heinous crime could not be treated just as a crime. It was a violation of white womanhood that did not deserve the justice and dignity of the law.

The crowd broke down the front door of the jail, but Sheriff Hartsfield bravely refused to yield the keys that would allow them through the inner doorway that led to the prisoners' cells. The crowd now determined to break their way into the jail by destroying the interior doors. This was the jail originally built in 1836 with thick logs and strap iron and then rebuilt after the
Civil War, when it had been burned, and now covered in a more genteel Victorian facade of brick and wood trim. This remarkably sturdy old building, designed to keep outlaws inside, now proved a formidable obstacle to the mob’s wrath. It presented a kind of contest between the tradition of law and order that had led to the jail’s immediate construction when the county was founded back in 1836 and the bloodthirsty rage that now, more than seventy years later, drove those determined white men to storm the jail. They worked for the next four to five hours, deep into the night, pounding, chopping, and cutting away at the walls of the jail to pull a terrified black man out of its protection. They got sledge hammers and cold chisels from hardware stores on the square and set about their work with furious determination.

Meanwhile, Nelse Patton inside his cell on the second floor must have heard his former defender, Sullivan, outside inciting the crowd to lynch him. During the next few hours he “could hear every stroke of the men, as brawny arms wielded the sledge and could measure his span of life by the ringing strokes of the frenzied men just without the barrier erected to keep him confined.” Before long, large throngs of men from throughout the county had joined the mob at the jail, coming in by foot and mule to watch and participate in the task. Two hours passed before the men broke through the first inside door and a “great shout of exultation went up from the part of the mob inside,” which was quickly “taken up by hundreds on the outside of the jail.” The scene, one reporter noted, “presented the appearance of a lawn party, where the guests were all male and in their shirt sleeves.” Out on the square a wagon bearing the corpse of Mattie McMillan passed the jail on the way to the depot. The mob continued its work to avenge the death of this woman, a prisoner’s wife whom few if any of them knew or would have cared about, except for what a black man upstairs in the jail had done to her.

Beyond the first door to the cells the men discovered another steel door, and they now decided to give up on that entry and move to the outside front wall. Climbing up on ladders to break through the wall to the cells upstairs, the men pulled away the brick facing. By this time reinforcements arrived on the railroad, men coming from adjoining counties north and south. The work resumed, now with relays of men wielding the sledge hammers and pick axes. Behind the brick facing they found twelve-inch-thick logs and behind them an iron lining four inches thick, the “old ineradicable bones” of the jail, as Faulkner once described them. This last barrier required a battering ram to remove. “There could be no more dismal sound to a criminal than the constant dull thud of crowbar and pick eating their way into his cell, and yet there came no sound from within the jail.” The sheriff and
his deputies had gone home. Some local preachers had tried to calm the mob's wrath, but they also left as the mob reached the final violent moment that was now almost at hand. Finally, they broke through the wall and found Nelse Patton "crouched and cringing in a dark corner of the cell with the gleam of murder in his eye." He soon turned into "a wild man with an iron bed post and a spade handle as weapons" flailing away at his assailants and wounding three men before a fusillade of bullets cut him down. They quickly hauled the lifeless body downstairs to the crowd outside. They threw the body out of the jail. Someone, John Cullen remembered, "cut his ears off, scalped him, cut his testicles out, tied a rope around his neck, tied him to a car, and dragged his body around the streets." The newspaper account said only that the men placed a hangman's noose around the neck of the corpse and "a hundred willing hands pulled his remains through the public square" and strung the body up on a tree in front of the courthouse, mocking the rule of law that building was meant to uphold. "The mob then dispersed quietly, at half-past twelve." 78

The memory of that long September night must have stayed with the people of Lafayette County throughout their lives. William Faulkner was eleven years old and lived just two blocks from the public square where the body remained hanging the next day. Faulkner later told a publisher he had never witnessed a lynching and could not describe one, but the killing of Nelse Patton had to have made an impression, whether or not he saw it or saw the body the next day. Elements of this and perhaps other true crime stories of the area were brought into his short story "Dry September" and the novel Light in August. In the latter Joe Christmas, thought by some to be partly black, slashes the throat of his white lover, Joanna Burden, and flees for his life. He is apprehended but breaks free and is chased by a posse before he is shot dead and sexually mutilated by Percy Grimm, who revels in his role as defender of white womanhood against the evils of the black race. Faulkner did not have to witness any lynchings to know their power over both races in Mississippi. They were the ultimate expression of the white rage that wanted not only to desecrate the black victim but also to demonstrate the supremacy of their own white brotherhood.
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racist mind. "Six thousand years ago," he declared in one speech, "the Negro was the same in his native jungle that he is today." The Negro freed from slavery was rapidly retrogressing to that savage state, Vardaman thought, and no amount of sympathy or help on the part of whites would save him. Education simply empowered his immoral tendencies and led him to seek social equality and amalgamation by more subtle, more insidious, and more effective means. In 1904, a prestigious Northern journal printed a statement of Governor Vardaman's views. The Negro was "one-third more criminal in 1890 than he was in 1880," the governor declared. Black male assault on white women was especially high. "You can scarcely pick up a newspaper whose pages are not blackened with the account of an unmentionable crime committed by a negro brute, and this crime, I want to impress upon you, is but the manifestation of the negro's aspiration for social equality, encouraged largely by the character of free education in vogue.” Shortly after taking office the governor closed down completely the state's normal school for blacks in Holly Springs, literally chaining and padlocking the doors and metaphorically throwing away the keys. Whatever education black people required, he said, could be gained while laboring in the fields.  

Most of all, the retrograding black male was after white women, and that not only legitimated the lynching of black men, it made such summary, horrible, and highly visible punishments mandatory. Rebecca Latimer Felton, very nearly the first lady of Georgia in these decades and the first woman ever, in 1921, to occupy a seat in the United States Senate, caught that mood perfectly in a speech she delivered to the Georgia Agricultural Society at its annual meeting in the summer of 1897—on the eve, virtually, of William Faulkner's birth. A year later, she recalled that there had been seven lynchings for rape in Georgia in the week before she spoke. "A crime nearly unknown before and during the war had become an almost daily occurrence and mob law had also become omnipotent," she said. In her speech, Rebecca Felton had no qualms about calling upon white men to do their duty. "... if it takes lynching to protect woman's dearest possession from drunken, ravening human beasts," she cried, "then I say lynch a thousand a week if it becomes necessary." Felton might have been gratified by the performance of white men in Mississippi. In the twenty years from 1889 to 1909, at least 293 blacks were lynched there, more than in any other state in the nation.

The Nelse Patton Lynching

Radical racism—this conjunction of race, sex, and violence—came vividly home to Oxford in 1908 in the lynching of Nelse Patton. Patton was a black convict lodged in the county jail, but he was also a "trusty" who was allowed to
move about town on various errands. Mattie McMillan, white, was the wife of a man who had been jailed. About noon on Tuesday, September 8, McMillan sent Patton to his wife with a message. When Patton arrived at the McMillan house, about a mile south of town, he had been drinking. He delivered the message to Mrs. McMillan, but then, the story goes, refused to leave. Mattie attempted to get a pistol from a drawer in her bureau, but Patton grabbed her. As they struggled, Patton forced her head back with one hand, and drew a razor blade across Mattie's throat with the other, almost severing her head from her body. The wounded woman ran screaming into the yard and collapsed. At that point her seventeen-year-old daughter appeared on the scene. Patton "attempted to assault" the daughter, but she managed to escape and spread the alarm.

Patton fled and white men scrambled to organize a pursuit. Among the hunters were the teenage sons of Deputy Sheriff Linburn Cullen, John and Jencks. A third son, Hal, was a classmate of Willie Falkner's in the town's graded school. The Cullen brothers correctly guessed the path the fleeing murderer would take and met him with shotguns. John halted Patton with two loads of squirrel shot, and the boys held him at gunpoint until the officers came up. Badly wounded, Patton was jailed, and the jail was put under heavy guard.

In the initial Associated Press report, Mattie McMillan was simply "a white woman." In a "fuller account" sent to a Jackson paper an hour or so later, she was "a highly respected young white woman," and "a white lady." In the first account she was "killed"; in the second she was "assaulted and killed."

The townspeople, in "a frenzy of excitement," gathered around the jail, just north and east of the town square. As night came on, "great crowds came in from the country" until some 2,000 people had assembled. One paper declared that "the entire population of the city and half the county of Lafayette was crowded about the jail and the courthouse." Judge Roane (the Falkners' neighbor), a minister, and others addressed the crowd from the porch of the jail, pleading with them to let the law take its course. Suddenly, lawyer William V. Sullivan, recently a United States senator from Mississippi and Charlie Butler's attorney in the 1880s, leapt to the porch and urged the mob to lynch Patton. Handing his revolver to a deputy sheriff, he ordered the officer to "shoot Patton and shoot to kill."

Soon, the mob, led by Sullivan, moved into action. They overpowered the sheriff, but wisely he had locked Patton in the jail building from the outside and hidden the key. Bravely, he refused to reveal its location, and the crowd turned its attention to forcing its way into the jail. The building proved to be a veritable Bastille. At first, scores of men worked at the large steel doors that barred the front entrance. For more than three hours they battered at the doors with sledge hammers and used heavy timbers as rams—all to no avail.

After midnight, they started working on the steel-shuttered windows using hammers, saws, and cold chisels. Finally, some minutes after 1:00 A.M. they managed to open holes through which they could see the inside of the jail.
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Sticking the muzzles of their guns into the holes, they sprayed the in bullets. A few minutes later they gained bodily entrance and four, bleeding badly and almost dead, slumped on the stairs leading to the floor. Putting ropes around his neck, they dragged him through the c. square, strung him up naked on a telephone pole, and riddled his body with bullets. Finally, they “dispersed, and Oxford was quiet again.” Nelse Patton's body swung through the night—suspended from a “telephone pole” that probably also carried the electrical wires that had lighted the homes of the city for the first time only four days before.57

William Faulkner was almost eleven on the night of the lynching, and his bed was not more than a thousand yards from both the jail and the square. Knowing William Faulkner as man and boy as we now do, it is impossible to imagine that he failed to record and retain every detail of the drama that came to his senses. Possibly, he saw it all. Surely he heard the first volley fired into the jail, then the fusillade that riddled the swinging body, heard too the fevered noise of the crowd as it rammed at the steel doors and came to successive crescendos in the shootings. Two houses down the street, in her bed, Estelle Oldham, too, must have heard.

In 1935, Faulkner would reject abruptly a suggestion from a national magazine that he do a lynch story, saying that he had never witnessed a lynching and hence could not write about one. It was a curious performance. He had indeed published a lynch story called “Dry September” in Scribner’s in 1931. In that story a middle-aging, frustrated belle accused an innocent, unsuspecting, hard-working black man of rape, and eight white men of the lower social orders did him in, quietly and secretly.58 This was a lynching in the style that prevailed in the middle decades of the twentieth century. They were secret and small and a far cry from the public and massive events that occurred with appalling regularity in the turn-of-the-century decades. In 1932, in telling the story of Joe Christmas in his novel Light in August, the author tried again, and he succeeded brilliantly. Though set in contemporary time, he wove together powerful themes of race, sex, and violence to capture the essence of lynching at its apex in the turn-of-the-century South. Clearly, in that writing, he recalled the Patton affair.

The details of the Patton lynching were specific to Lafayette County, but the pattern was general. The justification was rape or attempted rape, the crowd numbered hundreds and thousands, an active cadre of several dozen men did the actual work, and the body would be mutilated, castrated, and displayed in a public, ritualistic, and dramatic way. Afterward, white people would feel a significant measure of relief. The Patton lynching was also true to the general pattern in that it was done not only by “rednecks,” the lower orders of whites. It was done by everybody, and the white community found release in the event.

In the Patton lynching the prime leader was William Van Amber Sullivan, a man we have met before and who was certainly no redneck. He attended Ole Miss, graduated from Vanderbilt University in 1875 at age eighteen, and read
law. In 1880, he and his wife Belle lived in modest material circumstances, but over the years his law practice grew steadily and he rose to the ranks of the well-to-do. In time, the couple had four children and joined the social elite of Oxford. In 1894, we catch a glimpse of William going off to the races in Memphis with the George W. Buffaloes and other prominent Oxfordians. In 1895, Belle died, and William continued to move upward in prestige and power. In 1897, he won a seat in the United States House of Representatives, the seat that had been occupied by Jacob Thompson and L.Q.C. Lamar. The death of Mississippi senator Edward C. Walthall resulted in his elevation in 1898 to the Senate by appointment of the governor and his election subsequently to fill out the term until March, 1901. Sullivan was very busy at the law after his return from Washington, and one of his regular clients was—amazingly—Nelse Patton.

"Nelse" (for Nelson) was a bootlegger. He was well known to the Oxford community long before his lynching, particularly to officers of the law and to those who patronized his apparently flourishing business. He carried in his name the names of two eminent Lafayette County families, but he seems to have been notorious as a denizen of the netherworld of Oxford and environs. In the mid-1890s he was brought into court and indicted for "Assault and Battery with intent to kill." He was a frequent visitor to the courts in the middle years of the first decade of the century, invariably for "retailing," that is, for selling liquor contrary to law. In Oxford, selling liquor was a special crime because it was illegal to sell spirits within five miles of the university, a law obviously—and futilely—designed to preserve youthful students in their innocence of alcohol.

Apparently, Nelse was plying his trade against a flooding tide of opposition from respectable citizens in the community. In 1906 the Eagle published an impassioned appeal to the men of Oxford to rid the town of "the blind tiger in our midst." A "blind tiger" was a drinking place. In the next year the authorities even closed down Bramlett's Drug Store, having found liquor there. It seemed that a war against alcohol was on. Between September, 1906, and March, 1908, Nelse was repeatedly hauled into court and finally indicted on five separate counts of retailing. After a great deal of hassling between officers, the courts, and lawyer Sullivan, Nelse pled guilty to two counts. He was then fined a total of $150 and sentenced to 90 days in jail. He had served time in the county jail before, and he had been out on bond while awaiting a decision in these most recent cases. It is not surprising that he should have been treated as a "trustee" in Lafayette County's penal system. Nor would it be vastly surprising to find that Nelse had been well acquainted with both Mr. and Mrs. McMillan before they all gained such signal public attention and that their familiarity was not unrelated to the reasons for Mr. McMillan's incarceration. In brief, it is likely that the whole affair was not so coincidental, and that white parties of both sexes were not as innocent as they might, at first blush, seem.

Somehow in the Patton case the community found itself confronting the
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alarming results of a commingling of race and sex with the disinhib of alcohol. This was a theme that profoundly disturbed whites in the South in the early years of the twentieth century, a theme that contributed to the horrendous race riot in Atlanta in 1906 and was soon woven into a film, The Birth of a Nation (1915). White society seemingly felt itself being drawn into a tangled knot of venereal corruption, and its solution was to blame the black man and cut the knot away in one quick, dramatic, and furious slice. If Patton’s behavior over the years had suggested that white people were losing control, that the moral order was dissolving anddamnation was imminent, his execution by the communal efforts of some 2,000 white men—“the entire population of the city and half the county”—spurred to action by Senator Sullivan symbolized that the crisis was bravely met and safely passed by those very persons. In Lafayette County, clearly white people would rule, and order would be achieved.

During the day following the lynching, Senator Sullivan gave an interview to a reporter. “When I heard of the horrible crime I started to work immediately to get a mob,” he declared candidly. “I led the mob which lynched Nelse Patton,” he boasted, “and I am proud of it.” He had viewed with satisfaction the results hanging on the square that morning, he said. He would gladly stand the consequences of his actions, and he would eagerly do it again if the need arose. For him, as for Joe Christmas’s executioner in Light in August, Percy Grimm, it was perfect justice. “Cut a white woman’s throat and a negro?” Sullivan exclaimed. “Of course I wanted him lynched.”

There is a mountain of ignorance, myth, and outright misunderstanding layered over the reality of interracial happenings in the South in the turn-of-the-century years. One of the omissions is that there was a flood of horrendous lynchings in the region beginning essentially in 1889. Indeed, between 1889 and 1909, there were at least 2,000 such events, a sort of temporary and localized insanity. The tendency has been to see lynchings as sporadic episodes, as brief and isolated events. This in spite of the fact that the NAACP in 1919 published a count and catalogue of these gory occurrences. In the early years of the new century, when some leading and thoughtful Southerners occasionally took the rash of lynchings as a whole and as a phenomenon with social significance, they often described them as the work of the lower orders of whites, “rednecks,” “crackers,” and “grits.” What we now see is that lynchings were part of a whole broad cloth. They were community efforts, made for profoundly cogent reasons, both conscious and unconscious, incited, encouraged, virtually programmed by a respectable element in local leadership for higher ends of social stability. After a lynching, clearly the white community felt relieved. God was in his heaven and life on earth was manageable after all.

In retrospect, it appears that the broad history of the South was, indeed,
simply writ small in Lafayette County. In the decades after the Civil War, modernity began to invade the region with railway and industrial expansion, an influx of the very visible products of technological innovation, and a reorganization of money, banking, and credit. In the 1880s, in particular, Southern whites seemed concerned about their own loss of sexual civility—as the killing of Sam Thompson by Charlie Butler clearly suggests. In the same years, civil awareness of the evils of alcohol commenced a distinct rise. In the turn-of-the-century decades, great numbers of Southern whites combined the two failings, and imputed them specially to black people—as the lynching of Nelse Patton signifies.

William Faulkner spent the formative years of his life in the very midst of the radical racist hysteria. It was in the social air, and a child could no more escape the miasma than he could escape breathing. Racism was, of course, institutionalized in the segregated, all-white Oxford graded school. William and all of the Falkner boys began school at the then customary age of eight, Maud having taught them to read at home. In September, 1905, Billy began the first grade in the two-story brick building on Jackson Street that his grandfather Charlie Butler had helped bring into being twenty years before. Billy's first teacher was Miss Annie Chandler. Her father, Josiah, had married into the Jacob Thompson–Peyton Jones connection. He had been a surgeon and eventually the captain of Company B of the First Mississippi Cavalry, the unit to which Herman Wholleben and other Oxfordians belonged. Her brother Edwin, born in 1893, was retarded. She and her sisters kept Edwin at home, where he could sometimes be seen moving about in the yard behind a high fence. 64 Miss Annie was unmarried and deeply fond of the children she taught.

Somehow Miss Annie's copy of Thomas Dixon's *The Clansman* (1905) found its way into Faulkner's personal library. This was a book that painted blacks generally as retrogressing to a savage state and black men in particular as ravaging, raping beasts. The book sold more than a million copies, and Dixon turned it into a play. Soon, he organized several companies that took the show on the road throughout America. By 1908, more than four million people had seen the performance. Two weeks after the lynching of Nelse Patton, the *Eagle* advertised the coming of "The Clansman" to Oxford, and a month later the play opened at the Opera House, owned by Billy's grandfather. Without doubt, the performance included the usual superbly dramatic and climactic scene in which white-sheeted, spiked-hooded klansmen sat on live horses on stage, also white-sheeted, witnessing an actually burning cross after having lynched Gus, a black man who had attempted the rape of a virginal white girl. 65 It is highly probable that Billy and his brothers had their usual choice seats from which to view this spectacular production. 66 Both the book and the play explained why Nelse Patton had to be lynched. *The Clansman*, interestingly, provided the basic story line for the film *The Birth of a Nation*.

Radical racism required lynching, but only enough to keep black people
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under control as they passed on to their general demise. Ironically, even the worst radicals saw themselves as paternalistic—as did the best conservatives. Sometimes, as the logic went, the parent had to be cruel to be kind. The best a radical white could do was to let black people know that they had to stay in their place until they died, and, if they stayed in their place, that radical could be generous to individual blacks. Thus Nelse Patton could be lynched while Mammy Callie was cared for, and the Falkner boys could consort with black playmates such as Joby and Durwue, the cook’s sons, and even with such adult males as Chess Carothers, a “freckled, mocha-colored man” who acted as valet and chauffeur to their grandfather. Chess, incidentally, had his own special terminal encounter with modernity. He struck a match to find a leak in the gas line of an automobile and burned to death.

Eventually, the radical image faded. In the South during the second decade of the twentieth century, the fear that had been projected upon the black beast was transferred in large measure to alien Jews and Catholics, and after the Russian Revolution in 1917 especially to the Communists—who often came in the guise of labor organizers, preferably Jewish, stirring up otherwise complacent blacks. Indeed, in Mississippi in the decade after 1909, the number of blacks lynched averaged six a year as opposed to fifteen a year in the previous decade. By the 1920s the ubiquitous black beast rapist was virtually lost to the white mind, and certainly to the history books. Our blacks were good blacks, Southern whites declared stoutly, and we were good to them. Previous unpleasant events were treated as curious and isolated episodes, largely the result of the particularly benighted racism of the poor whites.

Adolescence

During the summer and fall of 1909, just as he turned twelve and entered the sixth grade, Billy Falkner began to change in ways that would make him very different both from his brothers and other young men of the leading families of Oxford. He began to skip school, dodge work, and perpetrate practical jokes. “I never did like school,” he later recalled. There is abundant evidence of the truth of this statement. At one level, no doubt Billy was experiencing the “growing pains,” as they were then called, that all young people suffer as they approach adulthood. Nevertheless, the course he steered to make that passage was decidedly different from those usual among his contemporaries. At least five individuals played crucial roles in this particular transition—his mother, his father, his grandfather, Estelle Oldham, and a young Oxfordian several years his senior named Phil Stone.

“I escaped my mother’s influence pretty easy,” Faulkner once declared, revealing an amazing lack of self-understanding. In truth, taking the whole of his