

*A Brief Overview of the*

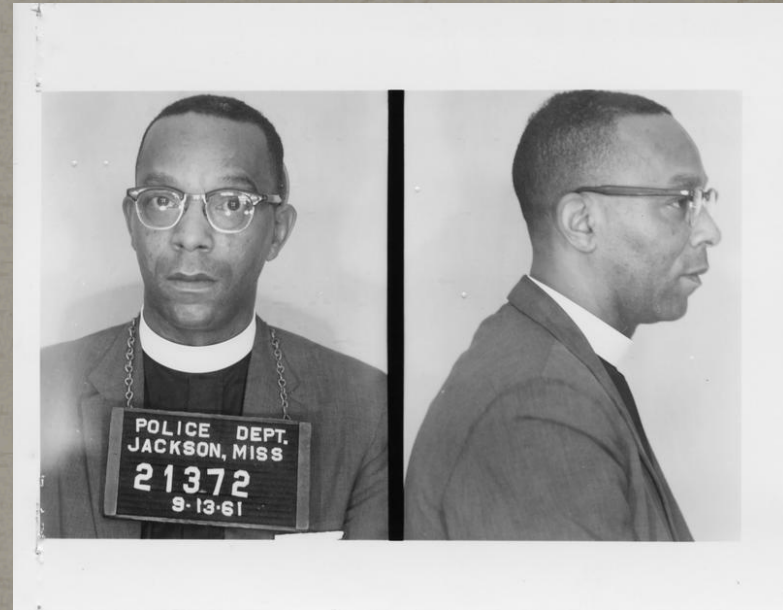
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**Mississippi State  
Sovereignty Commission**



# Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission

- What was it?
- When was it?
- How did it work?
- Where was it?
- Who was it?
- What happened next?





# Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission

## What was it?

The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission was a state agency created “to monitor and disrupt civil rights activities.” (American Radio Works)

The Commission’s stated objective was to “do and perform any and all acts deemed necessary and proper to protect the sovereignty of the state of Mississippi, and her sister states . . .” from perceived “encroachment thereon by the Federal Government or any branch, department or agency thereof.”

The Sovereignty Commission was a “spy agency and propaganda machine.” (American Radio Works)





# Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission

## When was it?

The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission (referred to as the Commission) was created by the Mississippi legislature on March 29, 1956.

It was the Mississippi government's response to the May 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* stating that segregated schools are inherently unequal.

The Commission was officially dissolved in 1977.





# Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission

## How did it work?

The Sovereignty Commission attempted to undermine the civil rights movement and maintain white supremacy in the following ways:



# Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission

## How did it work?

1. Investigating and disrupting individuals and organizations that challenged the racial status quo, especially civil rights workers.





TITLE: Investigation in Amite County in order to ascertain if there were any subversive persons or activities in that area at this time.

INVESTIGATIVE PERIOD: April 21, 1965

INVESTIGATED BY: A. L. Hopkins

DATE OF REPORT: April 22, 1965

TYPED BY: M. Curry

On the morning of April 21, 1965, I contacted Mrs. Sidney J. Caston, Office Deputy at Liberty in Amite County, Mississippi, and talked to her briefly until Deputy Sheriff Norman Travis came in, and shortly after Deputy Travis arrived, Sheriff Daniel Jones arrived. The sheriff and his deputies informed me that things were extremely quiet in Amite County at the present time; however, there are two white men living in the home of E. W. Steptoe, a Negro male who has daughters of high school age. I was informed that these white men or boys' last names were Sweeney and Gantz, and had stated that they were there for the purpose of protecting E. W. Steptoe. I have no idea from what they are suppose to be protecting him. Both Sweeney and Gantz have been arrested by the sheriff's department of Pike County and their first names, and possibly their addresses, could be obtained from Sheriff R. R. Warren of Pike County, Mississippi, who was in Jackson when I attempted to contact him.

Last Sunday, April 18, a mixed group was observed at the home of E. W. Steptoe in Beat 5, of Amite County, and I have been informed that this is the same group that arrived in McComb on Friday, April 16. They evidently were not expected in McComb as they were not met at the Greyhound Bus Station; however, they traveled to E. W. Steptoe's house on Sunday morning in a Cadillac, the owner of which is unknown at this time.

A short time ago, a mimeograph pamphlet was distributed in Liberty and other parts of Amite County entitled "The Illegal School System of Liberty, Mississippi." Copies of this pamphlet were sent to the Hon. Paul B. Johnson, Governor, Hon. Jim Eastland, Hon. John Stennis, Hon. John Bell Williams, Associated Press, the Attorney General of the United States, the President of the U. S., and many others. I was unable to obtain a copy of this pamphlet, but since one has allegedly been mailed to the Governor's office, I feel sure that a copy will not be too difficult to obtain if needed.

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# THE CITIZENS' COUNCIL

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CITIZENS' COUNCILS OF AMERICA

August 17, 1960

W. J. SIMMONS  
EDITOR

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Honorable [REDACTED]  
Director  
State Sovereignty Commission  
New Capitol Building  
Jackson, Mississippi

Dear Albert:

This is a confidential report on a matter I think will be of considerable interest to the Sovereignty Commission.

Today Mr. W. A. Lufburrow, executive secretary of the States' Rights Council of Georgia, one of our affiliated state-wide organizations, phoned me from Atlanta the following information:

A young man named Billy Barton of Pontotoc, Miss., was actively involved in several lunch counter "sit-in" demonstrations in Atlanta, including the one at Rich's department store which caused quite a disturbance.

Barton has been employed this summer on the staff of the Atlanta Journal. He will be a senior student at the University of Mississippi this fall. He wants to be editor of the student newspaper at Ole Miss, and has the strong support of Dr. James Silver along with several other faculty members whose names are not known at the present time.

Barton is a close friend of P. D. East, publisher of the Petal Paper at Petal, Miss. We have a full file on East's activities, which are intended to be extremely harmful to the best interests of Mississippi, to put it mildly. Barton plans to leave Atlanta next week and visit East at Petal or Hattiesburg before school opens.

Ralph McGill, editor of the Atlanta Journal, has taken Barton under his wing and has offered him a permanent position on the Atlanta Journal after graduation from Ole Miss. All those who are familiar with the key position occupied by Ralph McGill in the left-wing apparatus will recognize the significance of this fact. It means that Barton is well regarded in left-wing circles as a promising young man, and has been selected for advanced training.

MAR 13 1961

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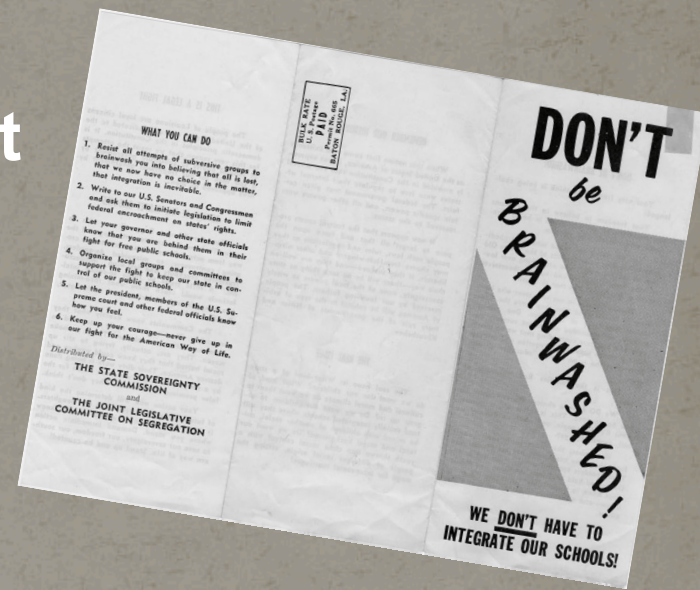
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# Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission

## How did it work?

2. Producing segregationist propaganda, such as this pamphlet



3. Sponsoring a Speakers' Bureau to argue for the benefits of segregation



# Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission

## How did it work?

4. Providing funding for white supremacist groups like the White Citizens Councils, an organization founded in Indianola, Miss. in 1954 that soon had hundreds of chapters across the South.





# Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission

## Where was it?

The Sovereignty Commission operated throughout the state.





# Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission

## Who was it?

The agency included a director, public relations director, clerical staff and a handful of investigators. It employed private detectives and paid informants.

The governor was appointed ex-officio chairman of the Commission. Other ex-officio members were the **president of the Senate**; the **attorney general**; and the **speaker of the House of Representatives**. Two members from the Senate and three members from the House of Representatives also served on the Commission.



*Ross Barnett*  
Mississippi Governor



# Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission

## What happened next?

From 1977 to 1998, the records of the defunct Sovereignty Commission were stored in a sealed vault at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History in Jackson.

In 1998, all Commission records not involved in litigation were opened to the public by a U.S. District Court order.

In 2002, the MDAH made an online full-text version of the Commission records accessible on its website.





# Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission

## Dig deeper! Look in the files.

- Access the MDAH Sovereignty Commission digital archives at [http://mdah.state.ms.us/arrec/digital\\_archives/sovcom/](http://mdah.state.ms.us/arrec/digital_archives/sovcom/)
- Search or Browse the collection by Name, Folder Title (subject) or for Photographs. Search directions are found here: [http://mdah.state.ms.us/arrec/digital\\_archives/sovcom/help.php](http://mdah.state.ms.us/arrec/digital_archives/sovcom/help.php)

