

MISSISSIPPI TODAY
ANNUAL REPORT

2017



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE PAST YEAR



IMPACT

Mississippi Today is the only nonpartisan, nonprofit digital news source in the state. We provide balanced and aggressive journalism, with a primary mission of greater civic engagement. Here are some examples from 2017 of how our reporting had direct impact:

- Mississippi Today's [story](#) about a lawmaker's refusal to take up a proposal adding domestic violence as a grounds for divorce in the state led to public outcry. Following widespread criticism, the Mississippi Legislature sought an alternative solution, which involved amending a separate bill to make it easier for domestic violence victims to leave their spouse.
- Our reporters broke the news of state Rep. Karl Oliver's [hate speech](#) on Facebook, and closely followed the social media uproar, which led to his [denouncement](#) by the state's top elected officials. Calls for Oliver to [resign](#) came from many of his fellow legislators, as well as the Mississippi NAACP and Mississippi Legislative Black Caucus.
- Mississippi Today's revelation of a little-known [bill](#) that would abolish the Mississippi Arts Commission created a firestorm of local activism supporting the granting and service agency. Several activist groups formed, including SAVE MAC. Continued [coverage](#) by Mississippi Today led to the bill's [death](#) one week after the story was reported on our site.
- Our [investigation](#) into critical funding shortages at the state medical examiner's office generated an editorial and prompted a follow-up report in the Sun Herald (the latter of which credited our story) and spurred other outlets to do similar stories. As a result, lawmakers are expected to address the [problem](#) in the 2018 legislative session.
- Mississippi Today reporters broke the state's first story of [sexual harassment](#) by a lawmaker, obtaining background information from the Speaker of the House.



STRENGTHENING OUR TEAM

Mississippi Today continued efforts to develop a sustainable business model in the ever-changing landscape of journalism. The addition of managing editor Harvey Parson, web editor Lauchlin Fields, reporters Kayleigh Skinner, Aallyah Wright, Kelsey Davis and Alex Rozier (former intern) were boons to the editorial team. On the business side, Mississippi Today expanded with the appointment of marketing & branding director Mary Margaret White.



TRAINING FUTURE JOURNALISTS

Our growing newsroom is an opportunity for students to gain firsthand experience. In 2017, two interns worked for Mississippi Today, providing support in reporting, social media and data visualization. Our editors and reporters served as guest lecturers at Northwestern University, University of Mississippi, Belhaven University, Millsaps College, Jackson State University, Tougaloo College and University of Southern Mississippi.



SERVING PARTNER NEWSROOMS

Mississippi Today content continues to fill the gap in watchdog reporting across the state. Our news stories were distributed to a number of in-state publications and news sites, and partnerships with NBC News, The Washington Post, The Center for Investigative Reporting, Report for America and Mississippi Public Broadcasting helped grow our reach. Our reporters and editors presented at The Paley Center for Media in New York, appeared on National Public Radio and were featured at meetings of the National Association of Black Journalists, National Alliance of Mental Illness, and Mississippi State Personnel Board.



FUNDRAISING

Mississippi Today expanded its fundraising efforts in 2017 with the addition of Corporate Sponsorship opportunities, and exclusive event underwriting. Continued foundation funding helps move our mission forward, with sustaining support from the Ford Foundation, Pittman Family Foundation and the Walton Family Foundation. New outreach and funding strategies for individual donors are currently in development.

INVESTIGATIONS & SERIES



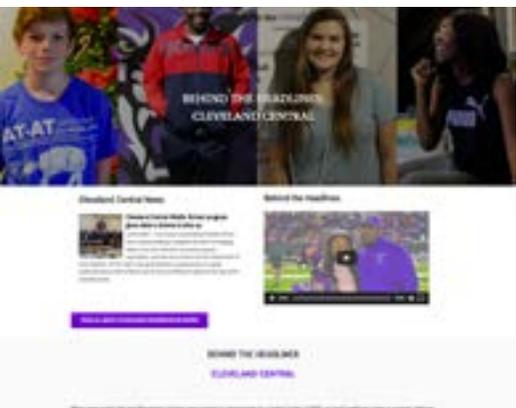
HEALTH CARE IN THE HOSPITALITY STATE

Mississippi Today took a deeper look at health care statewide, with a special focus on rural areas. Our [series](#) on the effort by local supervisors in Oktibbeha County to sell the sole local hospital brought statewide attention to the importance of maintaining community medical facilities. Subsequently, after a contentious campaign, voters in a referendum resolved to keep OCH Medical Center in county hands.



TAX CUTS AND THE BOTTOM LINE

A Mississippi Today [investigation](#) of the impacts of Mississippi's largest ever tax cut shed light on the nuances of the bill. Our reports on the [failure](#) of a similar program in Kansas paired with the feedback of independent economists provided facts about the impacts the cuts would have on the [state budget](#).



MULTIMEDIA: SCHOOL DESEGREGATION

In Fall 2017, Mississippi Today launched its inaugural [multimedia project](#) "Behind the Headlines," featuring students, residents and administrators of the newly formed Cleveland Central High School and their reactions – in their own words—to the federally mandated school desegregation. The project incorporates documentary style [photography and video interviews](#), and links to the ongoing series of reports about the [desegregation process](#).

FUNDING & THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION

Reporters wrote multiple stories on [school funding](#) in Mississippi, and provided an in-depth look at the development of [charter schools](#) around the state. We probed into the Mississippi Department of Education's [contracting procedures](#) and helped readers navigate the landscape of an [unprecedented partnership](#) carving a new trajectory for the Jackson Public School system.



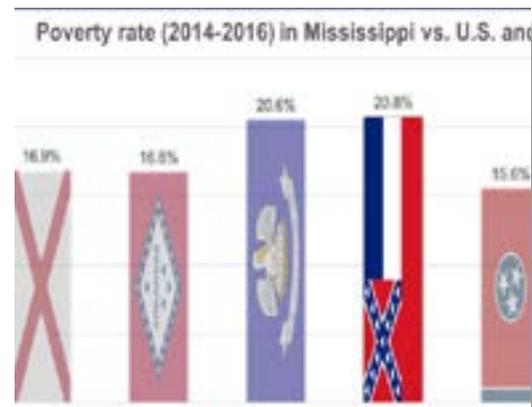
SPORTS STORIES

Mississippi Today's [sports](#) section serves as the state's premier destination for stories behind the games, players and coaches. Sports columnist Rick Cleveland was inducted into the Mississippi Sports Hall of Fame August 2017 and was honored as Mississippi Sports Writer of the Year for the 10th time by the National Sports Media Foundation. His series on [brain injuries](#) in football, specifically chronic traumatic encephalopathy (C.T.E.) victims from Mississippi, included interviews with family members and [follow-up reports](#) on the disease.



DATA CENTER

In 2017, [Mississippi Today Data](#) launched to give readers easy access to critical public information that the ordinary citizen likely has difficulty tracking down. #MSTodayData includes county-by-county searchable databases on the salaries of state officials, population change, income, unemployment and other information. The data page is regularly updated to reflect changes in statistical information.



ULTIMATE MISSISSIPPI PLAYLIST

A year-long bicentennial project, the [Ultimate Mississippi Playlist](#) features 25 songs ranging from classic to contemporary. Readers voted bi-monthly on their favorite Mississippi tunes, creating an interactive forum for discussion on both our site and social media. [The final playlist](#) debuted on Mississippi Public Broadcasting Radio as a special edition of [Next Stop Mississippi](#).

