

Mississippi Today Impact Report: Q2 & Q3 2020 October 2020

Important Stories

The Mississippi Flag

Sunday, June 28, the Mississippi state legislature voted to permanently retire the 1894 state flag bearing the Confederate battle emblem. This moment has been a lifetime in the making for many Mississippians, but it took a national movement for racial justice to bring the conversation to light in our state capitol. A great deal of credit for the furling of the flag goes to leaders from across the spectrum of government, business, faith-based communities, and yes, college sports. But, the journalism of our Mississippi Today team helped keep this story in the public eye and hold elected officials accountable for their position on the flag.

We listened. One of the focal points of the Black Lives Matter protest on June 6 in downtown Jackson was changing the Mississippi state flag. After covering the protest, the team was inspired: Just what would it take to have the flag removed? Framed by the voices of activists from the BLM protest, we outlined exactly how the legislature could move forward on a flag change, given that key 2020 legislative deadlines had passed.

Then we took a chance. On a tip, we published a story about backroom, bipartisan conversations at the Capitol to change the flag. While we received sharp criticism that our story came too soon--before legislators had enough time to whip votes in veiled exchange--we ignited public conversation on the issue. A small team of reporters polled every lawmaker and we designed a plain and simple tally of where each lawmaker stood on the issue. Soon after publishing, we followed with a list of municipalities, universities, private businesses and associations that had stopped flying the flag and had come forth to publicly stand for its removal. The list is long.

We broke the story on the NCAA ceasing post-season play in Mississippi and our reporting on SEC commissioner Greg Sankey's denouncement of the flag went viral. More than 5,000 readers took our online survey about their personal position on the flag, which further informed our reporting and gave voice to everyday Mississippians.

Mississippi Today reporting was shared and cited by national media outlets and notable leaders, including [Senator Kamala Harris](#), [The New York Times](#), [Washington Post](#) and Apple News. Mississippi Today editors and staff appeared on BBC, NPR and MSNBC to talk about our flag coverage.

COVID-19

Our goals are twofold: to create easily accessible resources to help readers navigate the ever-changing circumstances surrounding COVID-19, and to do so while keeping our team as safe and healthy as possible.

We have aggregated COVID-19 information in a few places on mississippitoday.org:

- All of our coverage of the coronavirus in Mississippi is gathered [here](#). This collection will update each time a new story is posted.
- Our [page with timely resources](#) including a timeline of what is happening and an updated [map of confirmed cases in the state](#). Our [free lunch map](#) has been shared by school districts and food banks alike.

Our COVID coverage has given particular focus to social justice issues magnified by the pandemic, including access to digital devices and internet; jobs and barriers to unemployment benefits; as well as the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women and girls, and POC.

Please see links below for examples:

Digital Divide:

[Are the kids alright?](#)

[Mississippi is getting devices to every child. That is just the first step.](#)

[Rural Districts Embrace Creative Solutions](#)

Women and Girls

[‘Not just a woman’s problem.’](#)

[Mother of four navigates eviction process](#)

[Over half of Mississippi’s childcare centers have closed](#)

[Coronavirus is a gendered crisis](#)

Jobs

[The ones who never went home](#)

[Unemployment rate jumps](#)

[State welfare agency isn’t offering more cash assistance to families in need](#)

BIPOC

[Coronavirus threat has immigrant communities ‘in panic mode again’](#)

[Where there’s uncertainty in the pandemic, poverty is a constant](#)

[More than 10 percent Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians has contracted COVID-19](#)

Mississippi Today's COVID coverage, including our reporting on the state's response to the pandemic has been referenced and linked in national media outlets such as [Axios](#), [CNN](#), [Essence](#), [Newsweek](#), [The Guardian](#), [Politico](#), [Washington Post](#), [New York Times](#), and MSNBC, Notably, our reporting was retweeted by [FCC Chairman Agit Pai](#).

Restitution

In February we co-published our restitution series with The Marshall Project, USA Today and Gannett, and have brought light to this odd-ball, little known program of the MDOC. The reporting is outstanding, as are the visuals and data. This reporting was recognized with the Sydney Award in February 2020. <https://mississippitoday.org/restitution-series/>

Voting and Elections

We are closely covering the historic senate race between Cindy Hyde-Smith and Mike Espy, as well as other ballot initiatives such as medical marijuana and a constitutional change to Mississippi Jim Crow-era laws. All election coverage can be found here:

<https://mississippitoday.org/category/election-2020/>

Mississippi Today has published a comprehensive [Voter Guide](#), available as a digital resource and as a PDF download. The Voter Guide has also been converted to a special classroom tool for educators that can be [utilized in the classroom](#).

We designed and distributed a 2020 #MSELEX crash course, a one-week, five-email series with detailed information on ballot initiatives, candidates and special elections.

We continue to closely cover voter suppression and election integrity across the state:

<https://mississippitoday.org/?s=suppression&search+submit=>

Impact, Awards, and Recognition

Mississippi Today Managing Editor Kayleigh Skinner and Senior Political Reporter Geoff Pender were recognized by the Washington Post on their list of ["outstanding reporters to watch in 2020."](#)

Reporter Anna Wolfe was recognized by American Press Association with their [inaugural poverty reporting award](#).

Polling locations in two Mississippi Delta communities were moved to larger, COVID-friendly locations after our reporting on one [Delta woman's fight for safe voting](#) was published.

Our coverage of COVID-19 evictions in Mississippi was [referenced and linked](#) by NPR.

Political reporter Geoff Pender was a featured guest on NPR's [Here and Now](#), discussing the Mississippi Senate race between Cindy Hyde-Smith and Mike Espy.

The Online News Association Awarded Mississippi Today the [Al Neuharth Award for Innovation in Investigative Journalism](#) (small newsroom) for our restitution series.

Our reporting on Mississippi's fraught school recognition program was highlighted in August 2020 by Investigative Reporters & Editors (IRE) as the best in local reporting.

Mississippi Today swept the Green Eyeshades Awards with [five winners](#) in this year's competition.