CITADEL OF THE CITIZENS COUNCIL

While other Southern states move toward at least token desegregation, in Mississippi the diehard white-supremacists are firmly in control.

By HODDING CARTER III

GREENVILLE, Miss.

The roll-call of Southern communities which have begun at least token public-school integration in response to Federal court orders has been significantly lengthened this fall with the peaceful desegregation of schools in Dallas, Memphis and Augusta, Ga. In the last two cities, massive resistance on the part of unincorporated areas in the Deep South was shattered for the first time. While the number of children involved was not impressive, the psychological effect on the rest of the Black Belt South was immense.

But one state, which shares with Arkansas and South Carolina the distinction of maintaining total segregation at all levels in the public schools, remains as unmoved as ever. Mississippi has so far been virtually impossible to find any public manifestations of the falsity many whites are privately expressing.

As the pressure intensifies, in fact, for Mississippi resistance has taken on a new dimension. On one hand, violence runs rampant as both children and adults are treated with excessive cruelty. On the other hand, Mississippi now boasts a completely unified front in defying the recent Interstate Commerce Commission decision on the desegregation of interstate facilities. State laws were invoked in every city and county to stop desegregation in the local waiting rooms and terminal restaurants, and although the Justice Department promptly asked the Federal courts for a restraining order, there was little doubt that resistance would maintain until the last legal maneuver is exhausted.

The observer would be hard pressed to find a major citizen or political leadership form which violence is not endemic. There is a handful of white dissenters, and there is growing number with civil rights, but neither is formed into a strength which can influence the major decision-making, even for the continuation of segregation in Mississippi is pervasive, sometimes subtle and in many cases of high degree it is vested in the Citizens Council.

The observant finds it difficult to explain to an outsider just how powerful a force this white-supremacist group has become. Perhaps the best point to start is that the Citizens Council in Mississippi is a group of carpetbaggers, men who had no stake in the state's economy or the South's continued domination of the national political scene. Its leadership is now drawn not from the pulp ball but from the country club, and its membership generally reflects the attitudes of the middle and upper classes rather than of the poor white. And its aims are noted in violent language but in the careful embroidery of states rights and constitutionalism.

In fact, when the first Council was formed seven years ago, it was a group of community leaders in the Delta town of Indianola, one central purpose was to retain control of races and desegregation in the hands of the "better people." Then, it was a small, close society. Today, membership in the Citizens Council has come to be a matter of honor, and it is not unusual for a citizen to be invited to join the group in the Rotary or Lions Club. It is such an accepted mark of distinction, in fact, that many candidates for public or organizational office carefully add their participation in the Council to their listings of civic enterprises in which they have invested.

The Council's control of the state was formalized in 1958. In that month, Ross Barnett—a supporter of Mississippi's two living ex-Confederates and all but one of the state's daily newspapers, but with the all-out support of the Council—won a landslide victory in the Democratic primary runoff for Governor.

Since then, the Council has all but completed the construction of a political machine whose power is publicly unchallenged by any major state official. One of its dramatic accomplishments was the nary victory of Horace Clardy, a Negro student at the University of Mississippi, in the 1961 election. November by a state of Presidential "free electors" who eventually cast the state's eight Electoral College votes for Senator Harry F. Byrd of Virginia.

The original constitution—which in many ways is still used, particularly in the cities—is still used, particularly in the cities—is still used, particularly in the cities—were of men who were on the Council's church groups, or despicable its membership in the Rotary or Lions Club. Its membership generally reflects the attitudes of the middle and upper classes rather than the poor white.

The featured attraction which had Council endorsement. The chairman begins with a call for a united effort on the part of the Council's influence in the state government. Perhaps most significant is the fact that William Simmon, editor of the Council's newspaper and administrator of the state association, has become a constant companion of Governor Barnett, traveling with him when he makes out-of-state talks (many of which Simmon reputedly writes and sitting in as "observer" at most meetings of the Sovereignty Commission). During the last regular session of the legislative body in 1960, that body acted as little more than a rubber stamp for bills which had Council endorsement. One gave local Negroes a chance to secede from their parents churches, taking church property with them, if they found themselves in conflict with the national denominations' doctrines. It was passed despite claims that it violated the constitutional separation of church and state. And that the Governor Barnett's major appointments were of men who were on the Council's church groups.

Individual Counties vary from town to town, but the general pattern is much the same. (Continued on Page 23)

Mississippi shows no signs of yielding to a process most white Southerners have grudgingly begun to accept as inevitable.