# "Never Underestimate the Power of Mississippi" A Close-Up of *Close-Up*: Jackson, Mississippi's Forgotten Black Magazine Kayla Henry-Griffin

#### Introduction

For personal and research purposes, I looked into my grandmother's life and legacy for my undergraduate senior thesis. I want to review my work in the past and go further on this journey of archiving my grandmother's history and in turn, my family's history. I asked my mother if there were any fragments from my grandmother's legacy. Unfortunately, after her passing, her belongings became damaged by mold and grime. However, there are still a few treasures hiding within my great uncle's house. One treasure that my mother had a copy of was a Black-owned, Black-run magazine named *Close Up* (or alternatively, *Close-Up*).

Close-Up was a monthly publication created by Close-Up Publishing Corporation that was run by Wallace Clayton Neely (or W. Clayton Neely). The magazine was also known for its subtitle as "The Community Ideal Magazine". It is assumed that this publication allowed Black writers to create a dialogue between them and the larger Black Mississippian community. Even if the articles and concepts are outdated, this publication is an overview of the Black Mississippi perspective. Another assumption is that W. Clayton Neely created Close-Up around the time he attended Jackson State University.

## Contents within March-April 1971 issue copy of *Close-Up*

This particular publication I have access to is the 1971 March-April issue of the magazine. Although this is a copy, the striking colors of green, red, and black were a representation of the issue's theme-the Black and African experience in the early 1970s.

Other than ads and a list of presumably Black-owned businesses, such as Star Amusement, a records shop, and Dynamic Photos, Inc., where they "Restore Old Portraits Like New", there is also a section called "Our Readers Write", which is similar to a review of the previous *Close-Up* issues. One review reads:

## Dear Editor,

It gives me much pleasure to read a Black-oriented magazine from Mississippi and Close-Up meets all of my standards. In your recent issue, the article, "An Historical Sketch of the Blues" caught and held my attention. You did a beautiful job of portraying the famous blues artists. I believe that many people now appreciate the fact that the blues are part of our Black heritage and nothing to downgrade. Close-Up has taken tremendous steps toward helping Black people understand their culture and themselves. I sincerely hope that such a magazine will become deeply rooted in the hearts of Mississippians.

Celeste Hardeman Gulfport, Mississippi

This 1971 March-April issue of *Close-Up* looked further into the necessity of Black health workers, the Republic of New Africa ("Yes separation-- No Integration!"), why Black studies is an important matter, and much more about the Black experience, on a local and global scale. Articles included:

- Across the Nation- Black writers from the United States discuss socio-political issues that affected Black people during that time (voter registration, employment, and religion)
- The Black Family in Historical Perspective- David Nall creates an in-depth look into the current Black family structure. Nall reminds the readers of what research was conducted on the Black family structure and how the research lacks historical context.
- The Need for Medical Black Power- Gloria Frelix's essay on the need for more
   Black medical power within the United States. During the 1970s, there was even

then an unequal amount of Black doctors and Black medical workers. Frelix goes on to describe how having more Black medical power will lead to a healthier Black community.

- Republic of New Africa- brief essay on the origins of the Republic of New Africa
  (RNA). RNA coined that they were the new government for Black people in North
  America. The capital of the government was established near Bolton, Mississippi
- The Blues: Africa to America- Bill Ferris tells the history of the Blues, starting from Africa and ending on Urban Blues Soul Music
- Myths Some Americans Have about Africa- Burns Machobane compares and contrasts the cultural differences between the States and Africa while criticizing Americans for their judgements on Africa
- Allen Johnson- A Man on the Move- Reverend Allen L. Johnson receives kudos in this article for his work in community building and creating homes for the people of Laurel, Mississippi

There is an extended list of people who helped contribute to this issue which includes publisher, editor, editor-in-chief, art director, lab technician, photographers, contributing writers, and many more significant staff members. There were several contributing writers in this issue, and several geographic correspondents, which included:

- Itta Bena
- Natchez
- Moss Point
- Holly Springs
- Meridian

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Staff included: W. Clayton Neely, Rubye Hughes, Sandra McClairne, Miriam R. Neely Holder, Eunice Wade, Ouida Buchanan (typo-also known as Quida Buchanan), N. Alfred Handy, Linda Smith, Peggy Smith, and C.E. Appleberry.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Contributing Writers included: J. Anderson, Josephine, Alivin Benson, B.L. Reeves, Richard Middleton, S.E. Warren, Victor Hall, Melvin J. McCrory, Chris Hinton, and Rubye Hughes.

- **Baton Rouge**
- **Dallas**
- Oklahoma City
- Melvarn, Arkansas
- Atlanta
- Lotman
- Los Angeles
- San Francisco

## **Discovery and Investigation**

The 1971 March-April issue of Close-Up holds a lot of secrets and emits an aura of mystery on each page turned. Even though there are a lot of unanswered questions about why this copy exists, I have made several discoveries while researching this issue. I learned more about the editor's life and background, the issues and topics that were important to Black Mississippians during the 1960s and 1970s, and that the concept of Black-owned was present during this era.



Photograph of Honey West and W. Clayton Neely in the pilot issue of Close-Up magazine.

Wallace Clayton Neely was an entrepreneur and the founder and editor of *Close-Up*. Through the Mississippi Secretary of State site, one will find that W. Clayton Neely created the for-profit publishing company with Quida Buchanan. Another source on the site shows that later Close-Up Publishing Corporation was preceded by Close-Up Publications, Inc., where the incorporators bear the same last names (C Daryl Neely and Jimmy C Buchanan Jr.); later on, Daryl Neely asked for a name change to the business and calls it Triumvirate Media. Inc.<sup>3</sup>

It is assumed that Neely created *Close-Up* after his time at Jackson State University. Several Google searches led to the Jackson State University's Delta Delta Chapter (also known as "The Rock of the South") site. The history page states that Neely and seven others were charter members of the chapter after T.B. Ellis initiated the Morehouse College chapter.<sup>4</sup> The date that the charter members and Delta Delta chapter were established are fairly near the same time the Close-Up Publishing Corporation was established (Spring 1966).<sup>5</sup>

The editor of *Close-Up* Rubye Hughes also had an emerging corporation that was established in the same location as Close-Up Publishing. Waltel Publications is presumed to be Hughes' vision for publishing journals and books. *White Racism and Black Powerlessness: Past, Present, and Future* by Ivory Phillips was published under Waltel Publications.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Business information for Close-Up Publishing, Close-Up Publications, and Triumvirate Media, Inc. can be found on the Mississippi Secretary of State website, https://corp.sos.ms.gov/corp/portal/c/page/corpBusinessIdSearch/portal.aspx?#

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> <a href="http://www.deltadeltakapsi.com/%CE%B4%CE%B4-history/">http://www.deltadeltakapsi.com/%CE%B4%CE%B4-history/</a> other members included Gene J. Chapman, Leon Elliot, Thomas Sanders, Hope Sandifier, Billy L. Sykes, Wiley R. White, and Roland T. Woodson.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> The off-site PDF given to me by Jackson State University includes the pilot issue of Close-Up magazine.

<sup>6</sup> https://www.amazon.com/White-racism-Black-powerlessness-present/dp/B0006C5PUC

What was very clear in the issue was the social, cultural, and political topics that were important to Black Mississippians at the time. Most of the articles' topics were in relation to the Black American perspective, but they were also topics that caught the attention of Southern Black folks. In "Allen Johnson- A Man on the Move", there is a narrative about harassment, housing and city development, niche to the state of Mississippi. Another topic that this issue recognized was the concept of "buying Black", which is the idea of buying and taking your services to Black-owned businesses. There were advertisements for both Black-owned businesses and more corporate businesses in the issue. In addition, *Close-Up* created "Shop Talk", a list of Black-owned businesses in Mississippi. It is assumed that the business would contact Close-Up Publishing to get their business name, owner's name, and address within the publication.



Close-Up, page thirty one. List of Black-owned businesses in the state of Mississippi.

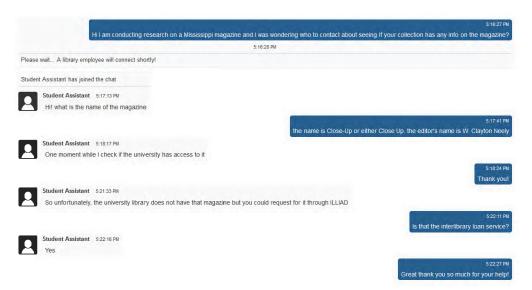
## Seeking Out Other Close-Up Publications

To further my research, I made several contacting attempts to Mississippi colleges and universities and I made contacting attempts to the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. The colleges and universities I used to conduct research included University of Mississippi (Ole Miss), Alcorn State University, University of Southern Mississippi, Tougaloo College, and Jackson State University. In an attempt to look for more issues of *Close-Up*, I went to the library services site of each university. In the search bar, I mainly used these terms to narrow down my search:

- Close up
- Close-Up
- Close-up Jackson
- Close up Neely
- W. Clayton Neely
- Close up publishing

Most of the time, the search did not aggregate any results. Once I looked into each institution's special collections, there were a few promising results. However, there was not much new information from conducting searches over the web so I turned my attention to contacting the libraries and special collections departments of each university. There was no response except from University of Mississippi, University of Southern Mississippi, and Jackson State University. Unfortunately, University of Mississippi did not have any copies of *Close-Up*, and University of Southern Mississippi did suggest had no access to the publication as well. University of Southern Mississippi did suggest

using their InterLibrary Loan services, but the services are only for students and members of the university.



Screenshot of correspondence with University of Southern Mississippi

However, Jackson State University assisted me in furthering my research. After several correspondences, I was given Xerox copies of *Close-Up* issues I have yet to see. From the copies, I found that the pilot issue was published sometime during the spring of 1966. One of the first pages of the pilot issue there is a publisher's statement; It explains to its readers the purpose of this magazine is to "disseminate news and information about the community and help all citizens of Mississippi to be informed of what's going on in the State". The magazine's initial purpose is slightly different compared to the issues published in 1971. From the copies provided, *Close-Up* covered multiple issues and topics, including beauty and fashion, education, entertainment, and sports.

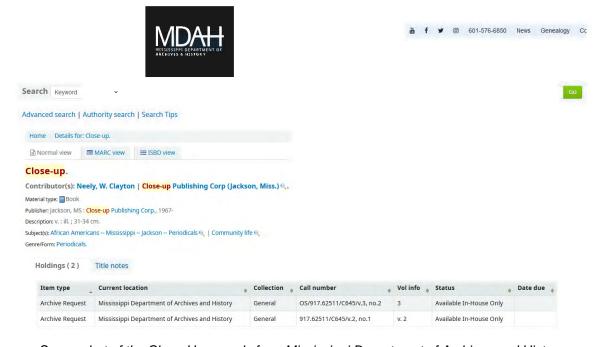


Xerox copy of the front cover of Close-Up's pilot issue



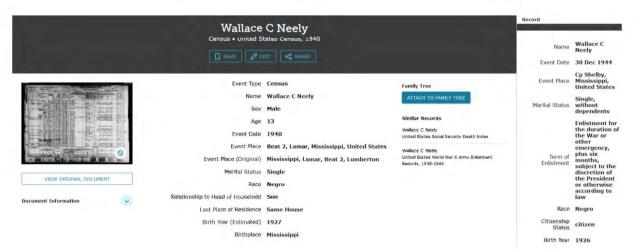
Xerox copy of the opening page of Close-Up's pilot issue

A quick search on Mississippi Department of Archive and History's catalog did show that the institution has two records of *Close-Up*; the specifics of which issues they have are unknown. No response was received when initially contacting the organization about the two records. Presumably the records MDAH have are from a few years after *Close-Up*'s pilot publication.

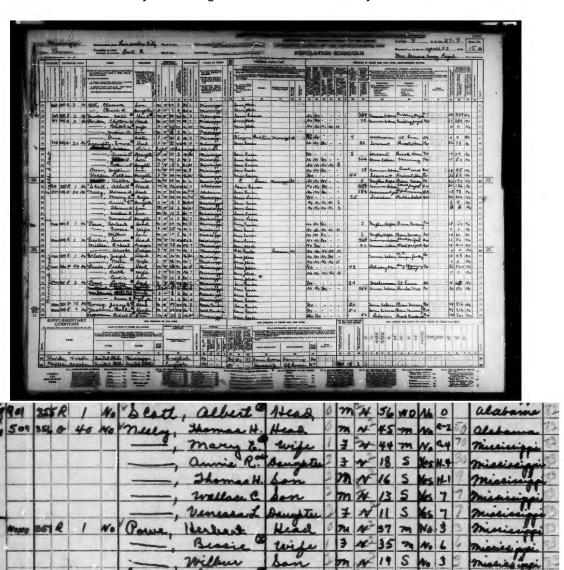


Screenshot of the Close-Up records from Mississippi Department of Archives and History

Ancestry.com as well as FamilySearch.org were utilized in my research as well. The two websites were a part of the research to find any other information about various staff members in Close-Up. Unfortunately, searching for W. Clayton Neely in their search engines accumulated many hits and I was unable to filter out the hits. I only have a photo and a name of the creator and I could not assume that W. Clayton Neely was born and raised in Jackson, Mississippi. If it was assumed that W. Clayton Neely was born in Mississippi, he was born in June 1926 or 1927 and was enlisted in the army.



Screenshot of FamilySearch.org record of Wallace C Neely with dated information



Images of 1940 United States Census document. Wallace C Neely's name is recorded in the document

## Challenges

Other than the publication being over fifty years old, there were additional challenges when researching further information on the issue and *Close-Up* as a whole. Lack of communication with the institutions was a variable when researching this magazine. Most correspondences led to no response back. There is always a possibility that these institutions do not have records of *Close-Up*.

The lack of copies in established institutions was another challenge I faced when conducting research. Even though the magazine was published in Mississippi and there was some sort of small fan base associated with it, very few copies exist within established archives. There is a chance that someone not affiliated with an institution has a collection of *Close-Up* within their residential home. It is still not confirmed why my great uncle kept my grandmother's copy of *Close-Up*, but the idea that this was "The Community Ideal Magazine" illustrates that this was a magazine any Black Mississippi home would have in their living room.

Due to COVID-19, the fear and incapability to travel was another challenge I encountered. Some of the institutions I connected with were unable to email me digital copies; the only way I could access the copies was to travel to the institution. Other institutions also had a policy that special collections were not available for off-site access (i.e. Mississippi Department of Archives and History).

One challenge that was more personal was that talking to my family members did not produce any other information about *Close-Up*. When asking my great uncle about the issue he copied for my mother, he could not recall much about the magazine, only

that he made a copy of it. My younger family members also have no recollection of *Close-Up*.

One of the major challenges when conducting this research was not being able to contact the creator of the magazine. When searching for W. Clayton Neely through familysearch.com, Google, and other search engines, there were multiple records of different people named W. Clayton Neely. I was able to find one photograph of W. Clayton Neely, but the photograph did not help with furthering my research. It is not known if W. Clayton Neely is alive today, but it is assumed that he passed away. His *Close-Up* Publishing Corporation also dissolved August 31, 1967. Through Google Maps, I was able to visualize where the company's office was located.



Screenshot of Google Maps pinpointing to 840 John R. Lynch Street (formerly Lynch Street). This is the address where the Close-Up Editorial and Advertising offices were located. The offices were located near the Jackson State University Baseball Stadium and One University Place.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Information was found on Mississippi's Secretary of State website. https://corp.sos.ms.gov/corp/portal/c/page/corpBusinessIdSearch/portal.aspx?searchby=agent&agentName=WALLACE%20CLAYTON%20NEELY#

## In (Black) Memory of Close-Up

Going back to the submission to "Our Readers Write", Celeste Hardeman hoped that *Close-Up* will "become deeply rooted in the hearts of Mississippians". So why is there barely a trace of the magazine *Close-Up*? As stated before, there are very few copies of the magazine and luckily my family has an original copy and a Xerox copy of one of the 1971 issues. The full history of the rise and fall of *Close-Up* is unknown, but there are a few possible reasons why this history has many holes. One possibility is that no one has thought about archiving these issues. This could be related to the theory that the publication was created during W. Clayton Neely's time in college. Neely could have created the *Close-Up* corporation and publication for an academic project and was not meant to last for a long time. Another possibility is that not many issues were distributed. One reader of *Close-Up* stated in "Our Readers Write", "May I suggest that you try to get a broader distribution area. I would like to see the magazine read by more people."

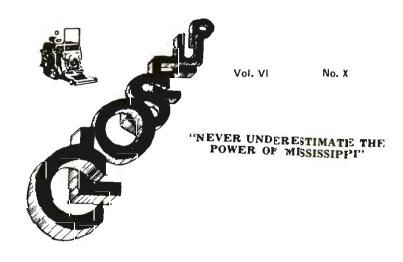
There is not only a Black history to think about when thinking of preserving 

Close-Up-- one must think about a Black memory as well. How has Black memory been 
extracted and archived? Is there an archive of all Black perspectives and experiences? 
How does the Black community hold on to memory when there is nothing to physically 
hold? In "Pedagogies of the Sacred: Making the Invisible Tangible", the Invocation of 
Mojuba reads:

Mojuba: an expansive memory refusing to be housed in any single place, bound by the limits of time, enclosed within the outlines of a map, encased in the physicality of body, or imprisoned as exhibit in a museum.<sup>8</sup>

In this case, *Close-Up* is a memory of southern Black folk and their socio-cultural viewpoints during the 1970 era. *Close-Up* is not bound by Xerox copy pages, nor is the history of *Close-Up* enclosed within a Mississippi archive. My family and many others are part of *Close-Up* because the magazine was a reflection of Black Mississippians with progressive ideologies. Close-Up is a manifestation of the Black voices in the United States, specifically Black voices in Mississippi. It could be said that the Black Mississippi voice is lacking in socio-cultural dialogues, but I would like to argue that this gem of a magazine shows the voices are alive and thriving. As written on page three of the copy of the 1971 March-April issue of *Close-Up*:

"NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF MISSISSIPPI".



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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> "Pedagogies of the Sacred: Making the Invisible Tangible" in Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred page 314