Annotated article by Fleming to Query Editor, Newsweek, 20 September 1962

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nation (meredith): A air of nervous, tense expectancy hung over the sun-light Ole Miss campus at Oxford, 175 miles northeast of the state capitol, Thursday morning. Meredith, holed up with an NAACP attorney in Memphis, 65 miles away, had not appeared, and no one knew when he was coming. But he was expected.

On the sunny concrete steps in front of the doric-columned, red brick Lyceum Hall at the head of a tree-shaded mall directly in front of the entrance to the college, dozens of students, freshmen in blue beanies with red "M's" on them, upperclassmen in sports shirts, bermuda shorts, white athletic socks, white sneakers, girls in wide, pleated skirts that fell above the knees, sat sunning and talking. Two TV cameras were set up on the steps and dozens of still photographers hung about. Inside, in a special pressroom set up by the college, dozens of reporters waited expectantly for something to happen.

Along oak-lined University Avenue, leading from the little down-town business section to the college campus, a heavy-set woman in a red skirt was sweeping the sidewalk and carloads of police, plainclothesmen, FBI agents, marshalls drove along. At the railroad bridge leading onto the campus, two policemen stood in the middle of the street, directing traffic, answering questions. Over their heads a red and white banner reading "Welcome to your University" was stretched between two telephone poles. At the head of the circular mall (a one-way street goes up to the Lyceum, then back out), stands a 25-foot high stone statue of a confederate soldier leaning on his rifle, shading his eyes with one hand as he looks east. Beside it was a plain sign: "new students report to lyceum room 117 immediately after checking into the dormitory
Nearby, in front of a red-brick dormitory, three boys in shorts were adorning a maroon mercury sedan with the chalked words: "We're from Grenada. Drag races every Saturday." Across from them in a wide lawn, a Negro sat atop a green tractor pulling a gang mower along under the cloudless blue sky.

At about 11:30 p.m. Wednesday, a car whipped behind the Lyceum, men (or students) jumped out, hastily laid out a gasoline-soaked burlap bag across on the street in front of the student union building. Students poured from nearby dormitories to watch as firemen rushed to the scene and doused it. This was the third cross burned on the campus in a week. In addition, Meredith has been hanged in effigy.

But "contrary to reports," said the Sept. 18 issue of "The Mississippian," the student newspaper, "students have remained calm. The entire campus has been discussing the Meredith case and the students have almost overwhelmingly expressed a desire to continue their education without any interruption."

The Ole Miss campus, on rolling hills, is dotted with pines, pine oaks, magnolias. The downtown area is one-story little business buildings, busy streets. In the center sits a three-story old white courthouse building, around which overall old white-haired farmers snooze while housewives buy beans and tomatoes off pick-up trucks parked around the square.

For the last two days, the town has been alive with law enforcement officers. Some fifty Mississippi state troopers were standing by at the national guard armory. Twenty U.S. Marshall have been at nearby Millington, Tenn.

"It is indeed a unique and unusual thing that a person wanting only an ordinary education should find himself at the top news/
story of the day," commented Meredith at Memphis, where he had been staying at the home of Negro attorney A.W. Willis Jr. He has applied for a dormitory room, but it's unlikely he'll get one.

"They ain't about to give him a room and the folks that live down there in nigger bottom don't want him either," said a local segregationist.

Meredith plans to major in history and political science. He has lost about three pounds in the last two weeks, looks almost elfin at five feet, six inches and 135 pounds.

Meanwhile in Jackson, the state writhed madly trying to come up with some weapon with which to beat back little Meredith.

There were these developments:

Thursday morning, Hinds County (Jackson) attorney Paul Alexander went before Justice of the Peace Homer Edgeworth, and they tried Meredith, in abstentia, on a charge of false registration, listing a false address when he registered to vote in 1960. Then a student at Jackson State college in Jackson, Meredith listed his residence as Hinds County, instead of Koscuisko in Attalla County. The county court found him guilty, sentenced him to a year in jail, fined him $500. The U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals already overruled the state's attempt to block Meredith's admission on that score.

The 13-man college board of Trustees met for five hours Wednesday night in a paneled conference room at the University Medical School in Jackson, resumed at 9 a.m. Thursday, to further discuss the case. The board has been balking at Gov. Barnett's obvious desire that they refuse Meredith admission, thus lay themselves open to federal contempt of court proceedings. There are three court rulings ordering Meredith's admission.
On Wednesday, the state proceeded through more last-ditch maneuverings.

A state chancery judge (comparable to a superior court civil judge) issued an injunction, brought at the requests of 47 Mississippians, many of them parents of Ole Miss students, blocking Meredith's admission. It named Meredith, attorney general Kennedy, FBI agents, U.S. Marshalls, enjoined them against "doing anything or performing any act intended to enroll and register negro James Meredith in the university...or any other thing contrary to the laws and state which would aid or abet the integration of any university, college or common school within the state.

On the same day, the 40-man senate and 140-man house roared with approval as two measures aimed at Meredith were rammed through with hardly a dissenting cry.

One measure was senate bill 1501, which says that no person with a criminal charge involving moral turpitude against him (it specifically excluded, however, violations of state game and fish laws) can be enrolled in a state university. "This bill simply keeps the convicts from getting into a state university," its introducer, Sen John McLaurin, told a cheering senate. The bill passed the senate in seven minutes. Then the senators dashed down the hall to the house chamber, watched the house pass the measure in four minutes flat, while three negroes whined the shoes of watching spectators in a little room off to the side. "This bill ain't aimed at no nigger," smugly smiled one legislator, puffing a cigar, "would you want your daughter to go to school with some jack the ripper?"
The other measure was house resolution No. 103, which gives Barnett "sole, exclusive right, power and duty to determine the right of any person to register" at a state school. There were only three dissenting votes. The bill means that the constitutional amendment, which will be voted upon in November by the people, takes the power to register students away from the constitutionally-authorized college board.

Rep. Karl Wiesenbarg of Pascagoula in Jackson County, a Roman Catholic formerly of New York City, was the only person to speak up against the two measures. As his fellows stamped their feet and booed lustily under the sun-lit house dome, he called the bills "stupid," said "they are unnecessary and only aggravate the situation."

Later, while his fellow legislators were pouring out of the chamber, dark-haired Wiesenburg sat in a tan-backed chair at the rear of the hall, said the Barnett administration "will go down as the worst since reconstruction days," said the governor has "blocked every effort at reform" in gambling, corruption, liquor traffic, scandals in the penal operation.

He confirmed what most observers already know: that Barnett gets most of his advice (and follows it) from William J. Simmons of Jackson, national coordinator for the Citizens Councils of America. "The citizens councils are running this show. Barnett merely acts as a mouthpiece for them," Wiesenbarg said.

"He (Barnett) is not calming this situation any. His speech (the one Sept. 13 calling for defiance of the government) was an open incitement to strife and disorder. He is just trying to make as much political hay out of this as he can."

Also on Wednesday, Meredith got a wire in Memphis from the Ole Miss registrar, Robert D. Ellis, ordering him to report Thursday to the college board in Jackson for registration. Ellis
said he had been relieved of his duties by the board.

It required less than an hour for the senate and house to railroad its two measures through. As they did so, clean-faced page boys, wearing slicked-down hair, white shirts and black ties, moved up and down the aisles, fetching cigarettes and cokes for the lawmakers. They chewed gum, and jingled coins in their trousers as they moved.

On the college campus at Oxford, mimeographed bulletins were dropped in front of dormitory doors Monday night, calling on students to resist integration.

The bulletin had an American flag in the upper right hand corner, was entitled "Univ. of Mississippi. Liberty Bulletin. Fall semester, 1962. 1st edition."

"Place yourself under the direction of Gov. Barnett," it said, "do not engage in force and violence unless he calls for it, or unless you are personally attacked. On the other hand, do not permit yourself to be intimidated by any leftist school administrators and officials from insisting and demanding that these people obey and enforce the law. . . . May god be with us all." It was signed "The colonel."

It's generally conceded that the citizens council, which has recently formed a chapter in the Oxford area, was the source.

fleming

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oxford, miss.