9-21-1962

Annotated article by George Metz sent to Birmingham News, 21 September 1962

George Metz
University, Miss., Sept. 21 — "I came here to register."

This single five-word statement and the later answer, "yes, sir," to a question was apparently all Negro James Meredith had to say here Thursday during a 10-minute confrontation with Mississippi Gov. Ross Barnett.

A few minutes later amid jeers from University of Mississippi students, the former Attala county Negro farm hand left the campus, the trace of a faint smile on his lips.

His request for acceptance at all-white Ole Miss had been refused.

Although Meredith, a 29-year-old Air Force veteran, remained in the Mississippi Center for Continuation Study adjacent to Ole Miss' alumni house for an approximately 25 minutes, only about 10 were spent face to face with Gov. Barnett, who personally denied his request for admission.

The meeting was as nearly formal as the occasion permitted.

Meredith and the two United States marshals and federal attorney St. John Barnett, who escorted him to the campus from Memphis earlier, were ushered into the Center's auditorium after finding several minutes after a short wait in its lobby.

According to a source who witnessed the meeting:
between Meredith and Gov. Barnett, the governor and Ole
Miss registrar Robert Ellis were seated at a table in front of the
auditorium. Meredith and his attorney sat down on the front
row directly in front of the desk. Others in the group, including
several law enforcement officers and school officials, filed
into other seats along the front.

Ellis excused himself. He declined to answer several questions
which Barnett attempted to ask.

The governor asked if anyone have a statement to make.

According to one witness, attorney Barrett punched
Meredith and the slight brown skinned Negro stood up. "I came
here to register," he was quoted as saying.

At this point Gov. Barnett began reading
his proclamation of interposition --- a legal theory already
declared unconstitutional in Federal court that state sovereignty
supersedes federal authority in certain
matters with which he hopes to block Meredith's
entrance.

Midway, he paused, and asked:
"You are James Meredith?"
"Yes, sir," answered Meredith.

After reading Barnett finished reading the proclamation and handed Meredith a copy. As far as he was concerned, the hearing was over and Meredith's application for admission to Ole Miss denied.

At one point during an exchange between Gov. Barnett and U. S. Attorney Barrett which followed, Barrett asked the governor was he aware that he was in contempt of court along with trustees and school officials named in the Federal injunction.

Lawyer Barnett is said to have retorted: "Are you telling me I'm in contempt or is that up to the federal judge?"

"The judge," the federal attorney was quoted as answering.

A short while later the meeting broke up and after what an official described as "some formalities" were completed, Meredith strode from the Continuation center flanked by marshals. He climbed into the back seat of a green sedan and, sitting between two marshals, was driven away, and jeered at by students.