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The most popular man in the State of Mississippi today is Governor Ross R. Barnett, a segregationist's segregationist.

People cheer him when he appears on the streets. He is on the front page of every newspaper in the country. Millions watch his face on television everyday. Yet not long ago he was booed by 31,000 people at a University of Mississippi football game. His prison system was pockmarked with scandals. The press and political moderates attacked him this year when auditors discovered Barnett had spent $10,500 for gold plating in the bathroom in the governor's mansion. Even the rednecks who form his strongest base of support were wild. Today, all that is forgotten.

in Oxford, Mississippi which has always been a stronghold of former Governor John N. Coleman territory, people are lining up strongly behind King Ross in his battle with the Federal government.

Today Barnett drove to Oxford from Jackson, and went into seclusion in the University Alumni house. The campus is swarming with police. They are wearing helmet liners and steel helmets, carrying gas masks and night sticks. There are also several car loads of police dogs, and more than 100 deputy sheriffs wearing white armbands.

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"He's riding high now," said Aubrey Seay, "owner of the Mansion Restaurant in Oxford. "I've never seen the people so united as they are now." In

Some people feel that Barnett has changed his political complexion overnight, that he is playing politics with the Meredith crisis in order to secure his own future in office. Their reasoning goes that even Mississippians who do not like Barnett respect him for his stand against the Federal government. To them Ross has shown "guts," and the type of independent spirit that characterizes the state.

Barnett has definitely used the race issue to shore up his shaky political image, just as Governor Theodore Bilbo did before him. Just as "Cotton Ed" Smith did in South Carolina. Race without reason has always been one of Barnett aces in the hole and while he may not be the best of administrators he is an expert when it comes to stirring up people's passion and keeping them stirred up. And, Barnett has managed to twist the issue slightly as well. Most Mississippians see the Meredith crisis as a battle to see whether the State government still has any power left or if all power now rests in the Federal courts. It is a test of the 10th amendment. One hears little about the violation of civil rights or the constitution, or whether Meredith as a citizen is being deprived of rights. That has all been rationalized away in the burst of insurrection that grips the state. It is the battle of the underdog against the giants,
of man against modern society, and fiesty Mississippians who have always warmed to a good fight have taken this one to heart.

"I think he's exactly right in what he's doing," said one Oxonian (FY.I. but no attribution Jimmy Falkner, cousin of Nobel prize winning novelist William Faulkner) I've never voted for him but I'm 100 percent behind what he's doing except for a few of the speeches he has made. If they held an election tomorrow Ross would win in a walk. He's elected already no matter what happens from now on."

And on the lawn of the State capitol a construction worker yipped with delight when Barnett turned Meredith down for admission. "I'll vote for him for the rest of my life, and his son and grandson after him." And politicians in the State house cynically that Senator John Stennis' seat is up for reelection next year.

Still, Barnett seems sincere in what he is doing. He has carried his resistance beyond logical political expediency, gotten himself out on a line where he can not back down. It is this spirit that is winning him friends. A junior at the University of Mississippi said, "For college students he's been nothing but popular. He was booted unmercifully at homecoming two years ago. But now that it has boiled down to a conflict between state and federal government and the 10th and 14th amendment it's all changed. There was a time when I said I'd rather
go to school with Meredith than Barnett, but now I'd back the governor right down the line in anything he did short of closing the school."

And they are not completely won over yet, but they do admire him for standing up to the "Feds." For many Mississippians, the whole battle has been a way to take one big swat at President Kennedy, who is heartily disliked in many circles. A senior from Jackson, Mississippi, argued, "I think everyone thought he was pretty much of an ass, but they respect him because he took such a strong stand. I don't think anybody who has thought about it has changed their opinion very much, but they'd be a lot more likely to support him politically than before."

However, it may be too soon to say definitely how much lasting political mileage Barnett got out of the crisis. "People in a situation like this are so easily jumped and change opinions so easily that it's hard to tell if it will help his political face," said a blonde co-ed. (F.Y.I. students are under instructions to stay clear of the conflict on penalty of expulsion so most were unwilling to give their names.) "I can't even think he knows what he is doing." However, she admitted that Barnett "might not have had much of a political face before, but he could run right now he would win."
No matter how sincere the governor may be in defending states rights, he is very much aware that overnight he has gained political prestige he never dreamed of having. Said a second year Law Student from Mississippi. "I really think he's making great political capital on this. He'll go to jail in a damn trice if he can do it. Bilbo was elected from the jailhouse, so Ross ought to be right in."

"The Feds recognize this his political ambitions," he continued, "and their staying away from it, but it's not political. Old Ross for once has backed himself into that corner and locked himself in."

Barnett seems to have made the most political hay with the older generation. Students remain a bit more skeptical. And ones who examine the situation analytically have not been completely sold.

Sam DuVall (Capt D cap V) a senior and advertising major remarked, "As far as the students go I think he has gain a little respect, but most of it comes from one man standing up against the Federal government."

In Oxford, a local merchant commented that most people are extremely unwilling to become directly involved, refused to give their names. "He's riding so high now that he could be reelected without any trouble. He could pick his own successor as he can't succeed himself, and that Senate Seat is his." I disagreed with other things that he's done.
but he's more than made up for it on this. 95% of the people in the state would back him on this."

The estimate may be a little high, but there is a rare unanimity of opinion among the electorale. They don't want a "nigger" in the University. The only thing they disagree about is how to keep him out. And, while there are many moderates who oppose Barnett's philosophy they are not speaking up. The "Let Ross handle it."

philosophy has taken over, and anyone who would oppose the governor now would risk stirring up a political hornets nest as well as white citizens councils. If Barnett should suffer a pratfall in coming days many would not desert him. But, for the time being he remains politically untouchable, and will be that way for a long time to come.