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Dudley Morris to Parker, Time Inc., 28 September 1962

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In the rolling hills of northern Mississippi, 500 feet up off the black delta land sits Oxford, population 6,400, seat of the University of Mississippi and the center of higher learning in the State. It is an old town, founded in the 1830's shortly after Lafayette county was laid out and named for the French revolutionary war general of the same name.

But before the desegregation crisis here Oxford was best known as the home of Nobel prize winning author William Faulkner.

Etched out of the black earth and its whiskey boiling countryside, Faulkner drew his characters larger than life. The spirit is there though. The craft of the Sartorises and Snopes runs through the thin, Anglo-Saxon features of the townsmen stretched out on the benches around the Lafayette county courthouse. This is a land in the words of Faulkner, "roaring with Protestant scripture and boiled whiskey."

The white, Greek revival courthouse still sits in the center of the square, and the main road from Jackson to Memphis...
still runs around one side of the square and out of the other. The main industry is, of course, the University. And the shops in town cater to the trade. "Welcome Rebel" signs are plastered in the windows of all the stores running around the square. The buildings are brick, some painted white, some raw and softly reddened with age. There are a scattering of drug stores, a college clothing store, shoe stores, a jeweler, real estate and insurance offices, and a record store. Oxford's other institute of higher learning is there.

The Rebel College of Cosmetology occupies the top of a two story building on the northwest corner of the square. And on the other side of the square, the local farmers park every day selling fresh vegetables, corn, peppers, beans, and squash. And lined up on a table underneath the graceful oaks that dot the lawn of the courthouse are fat, green, watermelon ready for sale.

During the week, the cotton gin in town hums constantly for it is the picking season. Bits of cotton dot the sidewalk, and along the roads outside of town are spattered with stray cotton bolls that have bounced off the wagons going to the gin.
Faulkner is buried here in a grave yard on the edge of town. The family plot is there near the crest of the highest hill in town.

But the great man lies in a newer section of the cemetery, under three oaks over looking a barren field of new graves. There is now stone and the grave is still raw earth with the only decoration a faded plastic chrysanthimum that sits on the dirt. Across the field is a development of new one story, one family houses. The architect is motly, some modern, some imitation colonial.

But in the older section of town under huge shade trees there are stately greek revival mansions. Buried in a copse of cedars on the fringe of Oxford is Faulknor's own house, Rowan Oak, almost invisible from the road but a stopping off place for most tourists who peer through the foliage for a glimpse of the great man's working place.

As you drive out into the country the polish of the Oxford University wears thin and the occasional negro sharecroopers cabins pop into view. This week they are working in the field, harvesting cotton. And in patches on both sides of the road their black faces peer at passing cars. Farmers carts loaded down with cotton pull daily into the Oxford gin, and the streets sidewalks and the roads outside of town and spattered with stray cotton balls.
Talk on the courthouse square and in the restaurants is of Mister Meredith, who baffles and perplexes most people here.

The conservative deeply southern citizens just do not understand his wanting to get an Education at Ole Miss. Still, it has not changed their life much. The country club still does a lively business, and 
the golf course and tennis courts near the University are packed every day. And on campus, students have grown used to the constant crisis.

Except for the times when Meredith has tried to register life has gone on much the same as before. Indolent, and good looking fraternity men lounge on the lawn of their frat houses. And scores of sexy young co-eds saunter between the red-brick colonaded classroom buildings. The atmosphere is not intellectual. The chief worry is the football team, the only institution in town with a bigger following than the governor.

But Oxford is a very liberal town for Mississippi. The University and T.V.A. power have carved out a little knitch of liberalism out of the reactionary and agricultural countryside. Moore is in favor of going to the extreme of shutting down the University to keep Meredith out, as it would knock the bottom out of the real estate market. Citizens struggle to remember the struggle the University had gained accreditation after the reign of Gov. Tilbo and are afraid the same thing may happen
all over again if Barnett is not curbed.

Still the motif of Oxford is the Ole Miss Rebel. A southern gentleman with a curly, devil may care mustache, who is posted on the bumper of dozens of cars, The high school football team takes their cue from the campus and calls themselves the Oxford "Rebels."

An almost roist
And in the air their unreasoning pride.

Citizens fight, bicker, argue, curse, joke, and among themselves but there is a deep spirit for "Ole Miss" and Mississippi that best compares to the flame that burns in the primitive parts of New England or even in the New Nations of Africa. One can not help thinking that no matter how misguided you may consider their thinking, the United States would be a lot better off if the rest of the country had the same ornery fighting spirit.

The spirit is best felt near the courthouse or on campus,
Aside from being the seat of the State University (chartered in 1844), Oxford's great claim is as the reforestation capitol of the world. In the rolling countryside of Lafayette county are covered by dozens of pine tree farms. Also located in Oxford are 20 Federal office buildings, the Federal court house for this region; a heavy, Victorian edifice.
redbrick building set across from the Sinixximex. Lafayette county courthouse.

only touch of Suburbia are the several supermarkets that supply most of the town's food.