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## Resurrecting Riots Serves No Good Purpose

Northside Reporter (Jackson, Miss.)

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# Editorial Page

## Legislative Report

### Resurrecting Riots Serves No Good Purpose

Six members of a Mississippi General Legislative Investigating Committee, all close friends and supporters of Governor Ross Barnett, have filed the first section of an unbelievable report in which they accuse U. S. Marshals of cruel and inhuman treatment of rioters on the Ole Miss campus last fall, including alleged use of a "torture slab" for prisoners and deliberate gassing of eight dormitories.

A number of other equally shocking atrocities were attributed to the marshals by the committee in the report which reads like something out of a Nazi war diary. If true, it would seriously undermine the confidence of the people of the United States in our national government.

Fortunately, in their zeal to indict and discredit the Kennedy administration, members of the committee over-extended themselves and went a little too far to be believed by any informed American.

In the first place the committee insults the intelligence of the reader when it said:

"The Department of Justice successfully concealed the actions of its marshals from the press and other news media by its management of news at the University. It took weeks of investigation for the Committee to learn the facts concerning the brutalities at the garage detention center."

This was a direct statement coming from the chairman of the committee, State Rep. Russell L. Fox, Jr. The statement is obviously false, completely without foundation. Several hundred newsmen from all over the world, who were on the scene, would so testify, including many from Mississippi.

It is a well known fact there were several hundred reporters and photographers at the University during the entire time of the crisis. All of them were free to come and go as they pleased — and they did. There was no restraint placed upon their activities. As a consequence the entire world got the story about what happened in Mississippi.

There was no "news management" at the University by the Kennedys' or anyone else. There was no attempt at news management by anyone, and if there had been, it could not have succeeded.

One might almost wish there had been some kind of responsible control set up so that false reports and rumors would not have been reported and published as fact in so many of our own state newspapers — reports which inflamed the emotions and hardened the attitudes of many state citizens. But these stories were gathered by our own people on our own papers — and this applies to state radio and television coverage as well. But we cannot blame the national news media for our own failures and shortcomings.

Here is what the United States Justice Department had to say about the report in a statement approved by Attorney General Robert Kennedy:

"It is an untruth document . . . so far from the truth that it hardly merits an answer.

"It is shocking to us that facts would be distorted or ignored and incidents manufactured. The report of this committee contains no names or facts that could be checked by anyone. Worse, it is a grievous slander against a courageous group of deputy marshals, more than two-thirds of whom are Southerners . . . who deserved far more credit for their courage and dedication to orders than such distortions and falsifications of fact."

Justice officials said it was "strange" that "none of the brutalities claimed by the Mississippi Legislative Committee were reported by newsmen who moved freely at Oxford and reported the event fully."

They also pointed out the marshals would not have been at Oxford at all if there had not been "interference with the orders of the courts," noting that no marshals were sent to Clemson College, S. C. when Harvey Gantt was enrolled there.

Justice continued:

"It appears to us this committee

might do some self-examination. There is going to be very little possibility for progress and understanding among all of us and the people in this difficult field if responsible local officials put their heads in the sand, and manufacture, rather than face, the facts."

Of significance was the statement Sunday by University Dean L. L. Love who dealt with federal officials throughout the riot. Dean Love said he knew of no students being subjected to a "torture slab" by federal marshals, as claimed by the report.

Dean Love, an honorable man who is not given to making statements lightly and one of no political ambition, publicly said he did not see "some of the things" claimed in the report of brutalities allegedly inflicted by the marshals at the Lyceum.

Mississippi newsmen on the scene during the time have also made similar observations since the legislative committee report appeared — which certainly casts further doubt on the validity of the document and tends to impugn both the honor and motives of those making it.

Surprisingly to us, U. S. Senators Jim Eastland and John Stennis joined in a statement "warmly commending" the Legislative Investigating Committee. The senators said the report is "splendid, factual, and reveals a heretofore untold chapter in the tragic events at Oxford."

We say "surprisingly" because it is well known in Mississippi that their own investigators whom they sent to Oxford at the time of crisis failed to produce a report to the public. Informed newsmen at Oxford said the probers sent by the senators left in short order after they found out just what had taken place there. It is a matter of record the senators themselves were strangely silent after their emissaries had left Oxford.

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Finally, what about the members of this legislative committee themselves? What do they say in reply to Justice Department charges that their committee report is untrue, manufactures incidents and in fact slanders dedicated and courageous U. S. marshals who have served their country well and deserve better?

(As to how well the 350 marshals did serve their country, it should be remembered that 180 of them were injured that Sunday night, 27 from gunfire at the hands of members of the mob. It is also a matter of record that not one single marshal returned fire. This was in spite of the fact that they had great provocation having been on duty since 4:00 p. m. and under open armed attack from the mob from 8:00 p. m. until well after 2:00 a. m. when army troops were brought in to put down the riot and restore law and order.) The marshals were wounded, bleeding and bruised. They were physically tired, hungry, thirsty and without normal creature comforts. It is no wonder that some heads did get knocked together.

After all, this was no Sunday School picnic.

It was a mob consisting of some 2,500 or more persons who were armed with guns, pipe, knives, acid, rocks, bricks, bottles, and virtually every weapon that could be improvised and pressed into battle, including a bulldozer. It was clearly war. The overwhelming number of the rioters were not Ole Miss students or students from other state schools and colleges, as implied in the Legislative report. They were people who had gone to Oxford in response to telephone calls made by professional leaders of the Citizens' Council in the name of Governor Barnett, unknown to him at the time. They included those who were there as the result of a radio appeal broadcast by a former major general of the U. S. Army, Edwin Walker, asking for "10,000 volunteers" to come to Oxford bringing arms and ammunition and "rebel flags." The mob included students, the mildly curious, and toughs who were looking for nothing but trouble.

The committee has said it will