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UM Honors James Meredith and Commemorates 60 Years of Integration

Signature event features recognitions and awards for first African American to enroll at the university

SEPTEMBER 29, 2022 BY CLARA TURNAGE



James Meredith speaks Wednesday (Sept. 28) at the Gertrude C. Ford Center for the Performing Arts during 'The Mission Continues: Building Upon the Legacy,' a signature event honoring the 60th anniversary of Meredith's enrollment at the university. Photo by Kevin Bain/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

OXFORD, Miss. – Culminating nearly a year's worth of planning, **University of Mississippi** representatives, alongside city, state and national officials, said thank you Wednesday night (Sept. 28) to the man who moved history forward 60 years ago.

A crowd of hundreds of students, faculty, staff, community members, U.S. marshals, and national, state and local government representatives gathered in the Gertrude C. Ford Center for the Performing Arts to honor James Meredith, who in 1962 became the first African American student to enroll at the university.

The event, "The Mission Continues: Building Upon the Legacy," was organized to honor Meredith and his continuing efforts to bring about racial equality on the national stage.



James Meredith (seated) is applauded by the crowd at the Ford Center, including his wife, Judy (left) during 'The Mission Continues: Building Upon the Legacy.' Photo by Thomas Graning/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

"Make no mistake about this, Mr. Meredith's impact stretches far beyond this university," Chancellor Glenn Boyce said. "He literally changed the trajectory of tens of thousands of lives – and that's just today. Think about the generations ahead."

Keynote speaker Ethel Scurlock, dean of the university's **Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College**, said she thinks of Meredith's struggle when she finds herself in hardship, and that she knows the university is working to accomplish and continue his goals.

"We all are working; we are making sure that your mission continues," Scurlock said. "We cannot repay you for your risk. We can only say thank you, Mr. Meredith. So tonight, we say thank you, from people across the globe who benefited from your courageous stand."

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Campus Briefs

Donations Sought for 25th Annual Books and Bears Program

OXFORD, Miss. – The University of Mississippi is asking the community to help spread a little joy this holiday season by donating to the 25th annual Books and Bears program. Donations such as toys, books, dolls, bicycles and other children's play items are being accepted through Dec. 14. All donations will be collected and sorted

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Thank You To Our Donors

Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship Aims to Build Leaders

OXFORD, Miss. – Twenty-five inaugural recipients of the Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship – a program hosted by the University of Mississippi School of Education in partnership with the Mississippi Association of Coaches and the Mississippi High School Activities Association – are expected to increase their impact on student-athletes and their communities. The coaching fellowship

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Ole Miss In the News

Clarion-Ledger: New Essay Collection Tells the Story of Meredith's Enrollment

Essays celebrate 60th anniversary of James Meredith's enrollment at University of Mississippi By Lauren Rhoades Oct. 1 marks the 60th anniversary of James Meredith's 1962 enrollment at the University of Mississippi as the school's first African-American student.

Among the awards given to Meredith or made in his honor were scholarships, student awards, the Mississippi Humanitarian Award, commemorative photos and posters, the publication of a book and an honorary deputization into the **U.S. Marshals Service**.

"Thank you, University of Mississippi, for this occasion," Meredith said, standing before the crowd in an off-white suit and a blue Ole Miss hat. "I can assure you, in my opinion, this is the best day I ever lived."

Ronald L. Davis, director of the U.S. marshals, recalled the more than 170 individuals who guarded Meredith during his time on campus and said that Meredith's bravery changed the course not just of the university, but also the nation. Davis called the event, "the greatest day of my tenure in the Marshals Service."

"I am standing here because of you," Davis said, moments before he deputized Meredith. "You chose a path that was not traveled. Because of that, I can stand here and say I'm the director of the Marshals Service. It's because of you that the Marshals Service is what it is today."



Ronald L. Davis (right), director of the U.S. Marshals Service, presents James Meredith with a plaque honoring the civil rights leader as an honorary deputy. Photo by Thomas Graning/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

The crowd applauded as Boyce announced that Meredith had received the Mississippi Humanitarian Award.

The award, which honors individuals who have demonstrated extraordinary leadership qualities that affect human welfare and create social reform in the university and state, has been given only four other times since its creation in 2001. It is one of the university's most distinguished awards.

Lee Cohen, dean of the **College of Liberal Arts**, announced the James Meredith Changemaker Award, which will recognize graduating students of the college who have helped broaden access, participation and opportunities in higher education for minorities or individuals from underrepresented groups. Meredith graduated from Ole Miss in August 1963 with a bachelor's degree in political science.



Chancellor Glenn Boyce (left) and Shawnboda Mead (right), vice chancellor for diversity and community engagement, present James Meredith with the Mississippi Humanitarian Award. The honor is one of the university's most distinguished awards. Photo by Kevin Bain/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

Boyce also announced the **James H. Meredith Legacy Scholarship**, which will be given to a student who has taken up the legacy of Meredith's mission to enact equality for all. Fundraising for the award, established by alumnus Dr. Steven Blake, began this year with plans to award it beginning fall 2024.

Shawnboda Mead, UM vice chancellor for diversity and community engagement, highlighted several other university initiatives and gifts that honor Meredith.

The James Meredith Speaker Series will bring speakers to campus each year who embody Meredith's mission Mead said. The university, in

conjunction with Yoknapatawpha Press, published "**James Meredith: Breaking the Barrier**," a commemorative collection of essays chronicling the university's integration.

The **Columns Society**, made up of 30 UM students chosen each year to serve as hosts and hostesses of university events, named its 2022 class the "James Meredith Class," and the university's incoming Class of 2026's challenge coin is a commemorative depiction of the 60th anniversary logo. Also, the **UM Museum** has designed its annual collectible keepsake holiday ornament in honor of the anniversary.

Mead handed Meredith a bound book of nearly a hundred letters that the Associated Student Body, Black Student Union and Graduate Student Council collected during the "Dear Mr. Meredith" campaign.

The letter-writing campaign will remain open until February 2023, at which time the university will bind the remaining letters into a second volume to give to Meredith, Mead said. Letters can be submitted via [this form](#).

Oxford Alderman Keshia Howell-Atkinson announced that the board of aldermen has adopted a proposal to henceforth name the first of October "James Meredith Day."

Noel Wilkin, provost and executive vice chancellor for academic affairs, in his closing statements, called Meredith a hero to the university and the state.

"James Meredith: Breaking the Barrier," a collection of essays edited by UM professor of journalism Kathleen Wickham, honors this historic milestone with

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"We must take stock in the significant events that transformed this institution, but more importantly, we celebrate the brave people who made it possible," Wilkin said. "While I fully understand that you did not set out to be a hero, you became one when you enrolled in this university."



James Meredith (left) shares a laugh with Don Cole, former mathematics professor and longtime university administrator, after Wednesday evening's (Sept. 28) program in the Ford Center. Photo by Thomas Graning/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

The event was sponsored by the offices of the Chancellor and the Provost, Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, School of Education, College of Liberal Arts, Department of Intercollegiate Athletics, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, and the Gertrude C.

Ford Center for Performing Arts. The signature event was one of **dozens of events** during a week of commemoration honoring the 60th anniversary of integration on campus this week.

Other activities and events will be held throughout the 2022-23 academic year and can be found on the [anniversary website](#).

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