

Bill Minor
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Jackson, Mississippi
Interviewed by David Rae Morris
Transcript

DRM: Can you describe the political and racial landscape in Mississippi in the late 50s and early 60s? Political and racial landscape.

BM: Here we are in the 21st century uh and uh we're not, we just can't really comprehend how the uh, uh emotionalism that surrounded segregation uh back in the 1960s. The uh state of Mississippi had never come to grips with the fact it would have to uh desegregated public institutions, public school, public uh u uh public uh facilities. And uh it had uh one of the key reasons was uh it's main uh biggest newspaper the Clarion Ledger and of course the Jackson Daily News their afternoon one had never brought the people along to the fact that they, they were have to at some point uh comply with not only the federal, with the uh Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, uh the Constitutional mandates uh that existed. And so consequently, the uh thinking was still so far backwards that uh I mean the uh we were, I don't know whether we were the most uh, uh backward on uh race relations in the uh the south, but we certainly [laughs], I don't know any one that was worse than we were. Here we were down here in the Deep South and we have to look up at what is happening in like North Carolina and Virginia and so on. But anyway, I'm, I'm trying to give you a little comparison to, to show you how uh, uh it was uh just unthinkable then uh that the--going back to like when the Brown vs. Board of Education decision comes down, 1954. Uh, this state, I was covering the legislature on a daily basis back then, gavel to gavel. Uh there was no idea that this applied to Mississippi, it was like it was somewhere else. I mean we were, we were excluded from it so consequently I mean there is this uh this thinking, uh this unre--unreality that exists uh and uh that why when Meredith uh comes along and applied for enrollment-- now remember now he is not the first one to apply for uh the first black to apply for enrollment at, at uh Ole Miss. You know Clennon King even uh even uh Medgar Evers. Nothing was said much about Medgar Evers' application. But uh, but uh Meredith uh comes along and uh this is 1962, and uh do uh and applies and Meredith turns out to be a character like this state has never encountered before and [laughs]. Uh but the resistance, the uh what was called massive resistance uh was the uh governing thought of the state and also the uh the official policy of the state and being uh run by uh a regime headed by Ross Barnett that uh that, that uh had, had led the people to believe that they were--we'll fight it to the end and we're not going to comply with any federal mandates at all. And the legislature was passing bills that uh said that uh, uh--I mean they began passing these bills now even before uh Barnett comes along. I mean they, they, they passed during J.P. Coleman's uh administration to arrest any federal official that attempted to sign a uh desegregation order on any school person or, or other official. And uh, now uh even uh I mean those of us who uh knew the situation intimately uh knew that uh that, that Coleman was really a moderate for those times. He was not

thought a moderate by, later on when he wound up on the fifth circuit court of appeals but he was he was try to do something by vetoing all these extremist bills uh when they were passed by the leg—now imagine this uh like when Coleman is elected in 1955, now see he precedes Ross Barnett. Remember now we have only one term, we have one term limitation on governors back then. Uh and uh, uh he, he's elected 1955 and this is when the White Citizen's Council had come into its real peaks of power, I mean during his time. He's faced with a legislature that's made of up uh more, of a majority of them are members of the, of the White Citizen's Council, now think of that. And uh they used to put out the little legislative directory the, uh, uh in the uh I mean, in the uh, uh the biographic information on each individual. And some of these legislators would put in their little biographical sketch that they were members of the Citizen's Council. And there was even one guy I remember who put in he's a member of the John Birch Society, I mean think of that. Anyway, I'm just trying to--that gives you some idea of how uh they thought, I mean, they were in charge. They had, this was, this was before we had any uh, uh, uh, uh, re uh, uh reapportionment of the legislature. I mean the legislature had not been reapportioned in 70 years mind you, see, think of that. And uh it had this, all these archaic provisions in the, in the state constitution about how many seats in each county, I mean, you know this is, this was uh the government was living in the past, and so far in the past. So in comes, you know, uh this little uh black guy who had been in the army and comes in and applies to get in, into the most prestigious white institution in the state. I mean this is a uh this is a shock. Ross Barnett has been elected on this platform that there'd be, there'd be no segreg—desegregation of it while he was governor. I mean it's, it's.....

DRM: Let me interrupt you. Talk for a minute about what Ole Miss represented to white Mississippians.

BM: Well the uh Ole Miss uh is then and I would say even some today uh, it's sort of the bastion of white supremacy in Mississippi. I mean it, you know they, they have all these, like the University Grey that they organized to go in the Civil War and that uh how almost all of them were killed and I mean they see, they, they, there's too much uh living in the past and uh and you know and the uh Rebel flag, I mean. It's, it's so incredible to think now, I remember it quite vividly. There, there was this huge Rebel flag that the Ole Miss band would uh, uh when they would march on the uh field for football field like in New Orleans in, in the, when they would play Tulane because I would always uh, uh alumnus of Tulane, and a very avid Tulane supporter. Poor Tulane, uh, uh. Anyway but they would, they'd come marching in on the field at Tulane Stadium with this, this uh flag that would cover the band from uh from one 30 year line to the other 30 line, and the entire width of the field. I mean, think, think of that uh, and the, of course when you play the uh the Rebel song, you know and play Dixie and uh, Ole Ro-- makes me think about Ross Barnett when they'd invite him to make a speech anywhere around town, and the uh the last thing when they'd invite him he's say [mimics Barnett] "Are they gonna play Dixie?"

DRM: What was the first you heard of James Meredith?

BM: Well, uh I, I don't know, it came in the news, uh but uh the person who was the one who led me to, to talk to Meredith, I mean the first reporter to talk to Meredith was Medgar Evers. He, Medgar Evers, set up the interview for me with, with, with Meredith. It was at the uh student union building at Jackson State. He was taking classes at Jackson State, you see. And so I sat down with uh Meredith, this had to be 1961, I guess. And uh, uh, uh I have to give you my impression, I mean. Uh and some of some of the impression then still hold today, uh. Uh, I can remember him saying this: he said there were, he had three ambitions, one to become a man; two to uh register as a student at Ole Miss, and three to become governor of Mississippi. Those were his three ambitions. And uh, uh, and then, but then in the, in the discussion uh I, I, I you know I tried to get to think, what kind of reaction do you think this is going to have with, like with the University and with the uh political leadership of the st—oh, he said, no, they'll, they'll, they'll go along with it. I mean they'll, they'll, they'll accept me. And uh you know, knowing how far off the mark that was in those days, I mean, I, I just didn't come out and say, well, look Meredith you'll, you're full of you-know-what. Uh but I mean, he was uh he was being unreal about the, the possibility he thought that uh Mississippi had uh, uh had advanced uh I guess it had advanced enough to accept him as the first black student at this prestigious university. And so anyway he had uh I came away from that interview thinking I said this, this guy is crazy, I mean he's just, just absolutely nuts to believe these things, you see. I mean he's not a you know, raving maniac or anything like that, but I mean, but the unreality of what he said was uh, showed just how, out of touch he was to the what, what the, what the uh feeling of the thinking was and the, in the, in the white supremacy uh structure of the state which was running the state then and still the state.

DRM: Do you think he really believed it or was he putting on a front?

BM: That is a hard thing to determine. Whether it's, it's, it's rea--Meredith the play actor, or whether it's Meredith the guy who really believes it. I mean, and until this day I have not really answered that question. Uh, Uh, I mean because he's, so many strange things he's done in years after that, I mean, you know like endorsing David Duke and working for Jesse Helms and uh he uh it, and uh it's so hard—even, even the, the, well I was up at the uh, at Ole Miss when they had the uh celebration for the 40th uh anniversary of, of his uh enrollment and the dedication of the, of the statue to him and the, the, the plaza that they've had. Uh and they had this uh crowd of people—it happened to be, it was in October but it was one of these remarkably warm October Sundays that sometime we have. And there was old Meredith with his buttoned up and with a vest on. Everyone is just dying, fanned themselves, drink water and there is Meredith sitting cool as a cucumber. Uh, but they didn't let him speak on the program I mean that, doesn't that tell you something?

DRM: The crisis went on for a number of months, what was it like ...

BM: Oh the let, you see all, we're talking about from the first part of uh 1962 right on up to uh September the 30th, I mean this thing had gone through the courts you see the federal courts and I covered all those sessions in between in the federal district court here in uh. That is what uh that memory always comes back to me, because uh they, you know, they had just built a new federal court house here which has just been recently opened uh but in this courtroom where the, these trials were uh being held there is a mural that, see the courthouse was built during the Depression, the Great Depression. And back then there as some WPA labor had gone into building it. You know there is a corner stone in the uh, of the building that uh mentions uh some things about the WPA, but anyway. In this courtroom there's this mural, it was painted by uh, it goes from one side of the, the courtroom to the other side. Huge thing, I'd say 30" x 40 or something like that, of, of a depiction of Mississippi as it was in 1935 when this was built and uh and the uh, the artist who did it strangely enough is a Russian. I don't know how this came about uh, still haven't found that out yet. But anyway the uh the mural depicts as it existed and it shows blacks in subservient rolls like picking cotton and uh, and uh then the whites are the uh, are the pay masters you see over here and the uh the white judges sitting on the bench and black are down, uh but uh it's obviously, I mean it represents the society as it was but it uh, it shows that uh it the uh the double standard that existed back then. And here Meredith is, all this trial is going on right with this huge deal and this little black guy up there being just harassed by this terrible racist uh Assistant Attorney General uh named Dugos Shands, who was a, just a awful racist. And uh, in fact uh, toward the end, I mean this thing went on all summer, he uh and uh, toward the end I think he uh had he, he be-it was so apoplexy during the trail that I think he had a heart attack or something, anyway he had to have, bring in, they had to being in another assistant uh but he would, but the way he would question Meredith I mean it as like you, like you would, you would think it was uh you know he was uh—I mean it as so demeaning and uh, and uh he's also being uh represented by this very imposing black attorney named Constance Baker Motley and uh, and uh and this uh lawyer who was assistant attorney general.

DRM: Let's talk about Ross Barnett. What was his role in all of this?

BM: Well I always describe Ross Barnett as the best standup comedian I ever knew who never knew what he was saying was funny. I mean these things would roll off his tongue. And I mean they were just incredible uh the things he was saying. Let me give you a quick example. Okay the day that he's going on statewide television to uh declare interposition that he was going to stop the federal government, the Kennedys and the federal government in their tracks and uh and keep Meredith from being enrolled. And uh this is when the case was coming down, I mean the crisis then see. And this is up in somewhere in middle September I guess, late September. And uh, uh they used to have this Mississippi A and I Board, it was called Agriculture, Agricultural and Industrial Board. It was the blue ribbon commission of the state because the governors would always put their big contributors on the—it was an honor to on it, you know. And they were supposedly in charge of the industrial program in the state. Anyway, but it was the only state

board that invited in the press. And they would have this luncheon when they met, they had this meeting once a month or whenever it was. And they always meet of course on the roof of the Robert E. Lee Hotel, where else. And anyway, the custom was that uh Ross uh in the, I mean, would introduce the members of the press who were there. I mean they'd give us free lunch, I mean that was our payoff. Anyway I was sitting way in the back because I had had, a, a, an operation—a hermo, a hemorrhoidectomy a week or so before. I'm sitting way in the back on a rubber inner tube and uh. And anyway Ross is up there and they have him, he's presiding he said "Uhh we have the press with us today." And he starts out introducing a guy from the Jackson Daily News, one guy from WLBT, and something and "Ahhh we have James Saggus of the A & P." Now remember that Saggus was the Associated Press correspondent, he. Well anyway knowing, and this is with the tension having built up to this point knowing that the, the crisis was looming, you see, the A & I board was just, the members were just up so tight. And so when he said that there was just like a little terror ? that went through the audience but nothing and then he goes uh and uh. I had been having little tiffs with Ross in those days and so I—and he said [snorts] "Uhhh, Bill Minor. " He said. "And Bill, who are you with? " And I stood, stood up in the back. I said "Jitney Jungle, governor." And they, they just fell out, I mean the members of the board. They, they just broke up laughing. You know, there's old Ross standing up there, he didn't know what was funny. And his, his assistant, his uh chief of staff over there, he said "A and P, governor, you said." And he looks around he still doesn't. And, and he goes over to make his speech at the I mean on the, and he's going to tape it and send it to the, there was no satellite and all of that back then see. And they taped it and they'll send it to all these stations around the—so he's over there and they have it on teleprompter and he, he fouls up several times and finally people are uh, said look we've got to get this thing in the can and uh get it around the state and said this governor this one has got to be a take and he said, "Alright." And so, anyway he starts out and he, he but how, he leads into how he came to the conclusion that this is where he is going to make stand and so he said, you know like the uh "the marines had died at the, at the in Saratoga and all these historic battles you now I mean several of them and Bellowood and so forth. And the marines who died on the beaches of Guadaca—of Guatemala. And the, and these people said oh my, and they said they didn't have time to stop, so it went out.

DRM: Talk about when Meredith tried to register in Jackson and Ross stood in the door.

BM: Okay they, there were three incidents that took place about registering him. One of them took place uh in the tenth floor of the Woolfolk State Office building. That was then where the state college board had its offices. And there had been an order from the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals that the board would register Meredith and so uh the time arrives and the uh that uh, uh and beforehand uh I mean the set time, whatever, Ross beforehand marches from the capital uh over to the state office building followed by his loyal lieutenants from the legislature. It was like in, in lock step you know it. It was just a hilarious, uh, uh parade. And they come in and this

huge crowd has gathered around the office building. See, I mean, people came out of the down, downtown shops and the buildings and uh getting crowded around. I was up on the tenth floor when the uh, that's right on the corner of the uh, of the uh college board and anyway uh up drives this black state, I mean, federal automobile and out steps uh, uh John Doar and Meredith and James P. McShane, who was, McShane is the, is the chief of the US Marshals and uh they get out and uh and this crowd uh even though they were—it's, it's a miracle that someone didn't try to jump him right, right then. But uh, but uh hissing and booing and everything. They, they go into the building, get on the elevator going up to the tenth floor. Remember now that they, uh they uh there were highway patrolman, all kind of political big shots, I guess, filled up the uh car in there and so they come on to the, the uh tenth floor. And uh, mean time see, Ross had come with, with his legislative lieutenants and uh in the college board office and just pushed everybody all the members out. He didn't think this was a constitutionally created board, they're supposed to be the most independent board in the state, he just comes in and pushes them in a back room and he, anyway he sets up positions in uh, and when the uh three of them come up to the door uh and are about to knock on the door out swings the door and out, out steps uh Ross Barnett and always Ross carries uh have a piece of paper with him, but what it was, was a resolution, some stupid resolution that the legislature had passed uh rejecting Meredith [unintelligible]. Anyway Ross steps out and he looks at Meredith, three, see. Doar, tall uh wavy haired, Midwesterner, the short black man with the uh pencil mustache, and then this pugnacious uh, uh US Chief of Marshals and former Golden Globe boxer and all that, standing right there in front of him. And he said "Ahhhhhhhhhhh." And he looked and said "And which one of you is Meredith?" No, excuse me: "Which one of you is James Meredith." The story has been mistold many, many times of saying which was you is Mr. Meredith. He never, Ross would never say mister at all, I mean it, he--because I was just like eight feet away right there in the corner and I heard it. And uh, but the tension was so great that we, nobody could laugh at the time. It took me three hours after the whole thing was over with uh that I, that I just, my knees buckled when I thought about how—and it shows you how, I mean uh you want to know, the comedy that goes into this. Uh see Ross is the hero, you see, of this day because like the crowd that was out front, I mean, they could kiss the hem of his coat if he, so all these, these, these legislators ah maybe some other politicians want to get on the elevator with him and uh to go—and they overload the elevator, the elevator goes down to the, to the, to the basement and stopped you know and where it won't come up. And so they have to exit the elevator through the trap door. So all this crowd is waiting out front for the hero to emerge and he's down in the elevator being taken out by the – finally get some highway patrolmen to come and get him out of, out of the elevator.

DRM: Years later we learn that he is secretly negotiating with the Kennedys.

BM: He was in conversation, telephone uh whatever, see uh the president would get on the phone but mostly uh, Bobby, who was attorney general would be the one who would do the talking. But all of those recordings are, you know, they're in the uh Kennedy library now and they play these things constantly.

DRM: So does Ross get a bad rap?

BM: Uh you know you could take a poll I think among Mississippians I mean, well I mean the, the people uh I guess overall rejected him uh because he did try to run for governor again you now back, uh, uh 8 years later and uh and ran fifth or something like that. So I mean, you could draw your conclusions from that. But still I mean he uh, he, he, he remained uh I think high in the legend of the, of the state. And of course then he, he would he, he just refused to leave the uh the uh the stage and he would go up to the Neshoba County Fair you know and started plucking a guitar and singing [mimics Barnett singing] "Are you from Dixie" and then he would go in the, and, and it was so pathetic. I mean then, but uh when he would uh wave his arms and make all these speeches uh there would, they knew, I mean nobody running for office back then wanted to be the one to follow Ross Barnett. So they'd put Ross at the end of the program.

DRM: September 30, conversation with the president and the attorney general...

BM: Well, let me tell you about that, now. There is this football game here in Jackson. I thankfully, I covered the football game mind you. I mean the Times Picayune was, had me uh cover uh Ole Miss games that was because of Healy, you see, my editor, and uh so I am covering, it was Ole Miss and Kentucky, the game. And uh, uh Ross is wheeled in, in his car in, onto the field and, I mean this is uh I mean this is like reminiscent of, of uh Adolph Hitler you know in the uh in the days when he would be brought in his car like a uh with the, the, the masses of uh Nazi sympathizers [unintelligible] uh and he's uh and he comes in and uh, and this, and the whole stadium is a sea of, of little rebel flags and uh he and he gets up and he uh, I mean they demanded that he say something so he gets up on, on the field, and I had the uh exact words I had written but I think it was like nine words he said: "I love Mississippi, I love its traditions, I love..." and anyway he just, but the aud, the crowd goes just absolutely wild. I mean I'm sitting in the press box, but it uh the thought hit me that uh this is exactly the way uh Nazi Germany uh must have greeted uh uh Adolph Hitler. Yeah, well see he had, what he didn't, was not telling the people was like when he came out to the stadium he had just been talking to the Kennedys at, at the mansion. And uh and making uh all these uh making deals. But he was trying to uh, he, he thought he could, see, I mean he is this forever this uh trial attorney, you see how he used to uh make the fool these juries and telling all these uh wild stories and so he uh and like say one thing but mean something else, and I mean trying to, and I mean that's the way he wanted to, he was trying to deal with Bobby Kennedy, and uh, and uh, and uh the president. And of course these are, these are uh are the hard thinking uh Northeasterners who uh I mean when they say things they mean it, you know. So any way, they were laying down the law to him and he was trying to make it look like oh we, we'll do this, we'll do that—he had no intention. The key thing that they were asking was that the state would provid, provide protection for Meredith when he arrived on the campus. And so Barnett is saying oh yeah and as it turned out he didn't and that's why they had to send in the army. And uh, uh but uh

these uh conversations were uh were uh which they play now and—but I, I was the first to get a hold of the transcript of the conversations. Uh and I'll tell you how I got a hold of them. Uh J.P. Coleman was a good friend of, uh had become a friend of uh, of, of Jack Kennedy, you see, so uh and Coleman was trying to make a comeback as governor too, you see. And so uh in uh try to help him they sent him a copy of the transcript. And Coleman gives me a copy of the transcript. And I am the first and only reporter to get it. And uh I, uh I decided uh actually the Times Picayune would not appreciate it enough. And I was, as the stringer for Newsweek. I told Newsweek I had this. Oh they were just delighted. So anyway, I, I gave it to Newsweek. And uh Newsweek put the thing up big you see. That's when Newsweek was a heck of a lot more, uh, uh important in the uh in the news and uh business than they are today.

DRM: Talk about the riots in Oxford.

BM: Yeah. Let me tell you. My, here's what I have--see I'm a one-man bureau. Okay. And the Picayune had no idea that at the beginning uh--to go back a little uh Healy, even though he's an Ole Miss graduate he's on a trip to Europe when, when the crisis occurs, you see. And then when, and uh, so I uh, I had been up to Ole Miss twice already in uh just the previous uh week with uh--See when Ross'—the first time Ross Barnett ever turned away Meredith it was on the campus at the uh at the continuing education building where they'd come in and uh and presented him, but it was closed to the press, he wouldn't let anybody, they wouldn't let any—so were, had to gather right uh outside the building just across the driveway and uh. But the students were just flocked into the, I mean this was, you know like a, like a sporting event. And uh in uh, uh so uh they would not allow any reporters to go inside, but uh we learned right away that he had, he had rejected uh Meredith in the uh it was the same situation I mean it's Doar and uh Meredith and McShane, you see. And uh, uh but then the students then were, when they got, came out and got in the car I mean the booing and the hissing and all that, you could see I mean there was so much emotionalism being built up already, I mean. It didn't sound right. See this is on maybe, I forget the date, that is the 19th maybe of September. Something like that. And uh and see the next one was the, was the one at the Woolfork Building. And then finally the, on the 30th is when uh when they sent him with uh, sent Meredith in with the, with U.S. Marshals, and uh, uh. But then let me tell you this is, I had to, see I was uh, the Picayune didn't uh, I mean I'm a one man bureau and I'm trying to decide what to cover you see. So uh the, the report got out that Ross was, that night when the, on the uh, on that Sunday the 30th that uh, that the uh, the marshals were going to uh arrested Meredith at the, I mean not Meredith uh, Barnett at the mansion. He had already been found in contempt, you see, by the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. And uh, the report was that he was going to be arrested at, at the uh the Mansion. So I had to decide what to do when uh the, meantime I had uh gotten uh I chartered a uh a plane with a guy who had once before had flown me up to Ole Miss uh previously in one of the, when I went up there just a few days earlier. And uh I had him standing by and he was out at the uh, uh the uh airport by the, not the, not the, not the, the main airport but the small airport over on uh off of Livingston Road. And uh, so he was standing by, I kept him

there until I found out during the night that uh that the riot had begun and uh and then the, the realized that, and then Ross makes his concession speech which was uh, uh broadcast uh, uh and uh he but uh then his, some of his uh his wild supporters here, big citizen's council types had rushed over to the mansion to get him to rescind his concession, you know and the, and he makes some kind of a half way uh, uh, uh, second statement but that, by that time it was, the, the game was over. Uh but anyway, I decided the thing to do for me is to get on up there. So I, I go, I get out to the airport by this is uh just this is uh like right in the uh in the, late in the mo, early I mean, early hours of the day and uh but my guy is there and ready for me and we fly and, and we arrive up there at Ole Miss about dawn. And fortunately uh I landed at the little airport up there, there was this uh highway patrol uh investigator, plain-clothes man who knew me, and he got me on to the campus. You see they would not let any, anybody onto the campus see. Meantime, see on that uh day, the, the publisher of the Times Picayune, now this is not Healy, not the editor, the publisher, who really didn't follow news, he calls me up and uh, uh that morning he said: this, this look mighty serious, Bill up there. I said it is serious. There's telling what will happen. And uh, look uh Mr. Tims, I, I need some help up here. And so he uh said, well uh—shows you how they didn't, they under, totally underestimated the gravity of the whole situation. They uh send the guy from, who is the Baton Rouge uh state, uh capitol correspondent uh who is a big, fat lazy guy uh to come over and, well anyway the story is that he never gets on to the campus. He didn't see, you see but see uh when I get to uh when I fly in, as I said I, so I was fortunate to have this highway patrol investigator who got me into the campus, so I was right there when uh there's still gun fire going on and they were, by then you see the army is arresting uh the uh some of the crowds that had, had streamed onto the campus. And what was amazing about the people they were arresting some of them were students who had come from Mississippi State University and some places outside uh, I mean not, not uh Ole Miss students. By that time, see some of the clearer heads on the Ole Miss faculty included uh, uh Duncan Gray and some other of them had persuaded the students to uh, the Ole Miss students to go back to their dormitories. They were, of course the families were just of these people were uh students were, were just... Get a call through the, they didn't want their, their children to get involved in it. But uh, of course they had already been very deeply involved earlier in the—but see by the time I, and I get there the smoking, burning cars, and, and this uh bulldozer that's been driven up, tried to, somebody had tried to drive it on to campus and then tried to drive it into, into uh the Lyceum building.

DRM: In your column you wrote the story you wrote on October 2, you quoted a marshal as saying "I've never seen anything like it, this was not a riot it was an armed insurrection."

BM: That's correct. That's, that's really what it was. I mean, it was, it, it makes it, it makes you wonder how this could happen in this, in this country but it was. I mean but, it was the uh the uh result of uh this policy of, this massive resistance uh I mean to try to defy the federal authority I mean look this is, this like re-fighting the Civil

War. I mean in many uh in many Civil War acts where, where I describe it as some of the things I wrote you uh, uh you, you uh I mean, I mean everything, the same logic that Ross used, like interposition and all these things that had proceeded the Civil War I mean here we are re-fighting this, uh this lost cause of 150 years before.

DRM: What were the long-term repercussions?

BM: Well, uh all the institutions were under the uh very close uh inspection of uh of the uh the crediting agencies and uh I mean it damaged all of them but it particularly damaged Ole Miss and of course it uh it left Ole Miss with this stigma that uh that lasted a very long time and uh you know when you think back that good gracious here are the, the none of the athletic teams at Ole Miss now, I mean, they, they couldn't, couldn't even compete if they didn't have mostly black -players on them. I mean the basketball team, like five tall black men out there you know and that's, it, but uh, uh that, you know it says something about Mississippi. I mean you have to realize that uh this same uh, this Confederate uh, uh, uh spirit uh whatever you want to call it uh is still, still around. I mean you uh if you're going to give these people any opportunity to uh, to uh display it—I mean for example I mean, when you tried, they tried to, in two double oh two uh, uh Mus, Ronnie Musgrove was governor and uh he just, all he did was to create a commission to study changing the state flag to take the uh the Rebel battle flag out of our state flag. And uh and then made the terrible mistake of submitting it to state wide referendum. And my god it, I mean it's defeated overwhelming, I mean by two-thirds vote. So uh, uh I mean and the, and the, and the vote count was uh more than, than uh voted in the last governor's race.

DRM: How has Mississippi evolved in 50 years since James Meredith integrated the University?

BM: Incrementally we have uh have, have been, we have improved because uh because we knew we would finally learn that economic factors are, are in control and that we have to realize that uh that we have a biracial population. I mean it did doesn't mean that uh most white Mississippians have accepted it, but uh they know it's uh necessary for them to accept. But as much as they can, they still have, keep a, the division of uh, of uh, there's un, there's an opaque sort of the barrier that, that exists between the races in the state. And Jackson is a perfect example of it uh, uh. Here we had the largest white uh, uh public school system in the state. Uh and now uh I mean state in the public school system it was all white, and just financed and a small amount of desegregation, but once when the, in 1970.

DRM: Where would we be without James Meredith?

BM: I think it, it, Meredith is a cathartic uh figure uh in this state. I think that, well one thing is it brought, what it brought about the crisis at Ole Miss it put an end to the, the White Citizen's Council. And it put an end to the, to that uh the, the leadership, I mean the white population in the state realized that uh that no longer could it follow this uh this phantom government that, that was, that was uh

embodied in this Citizen's Council. I mean they, because they were, they controlled government and the uh professional life and everything in the state. I mean it was a, it was a, it was a well thought out system of, of bringing in these uh the professional people, the business community. I mean they, uh they could, what they could do was choke off any uh, any uh threat from the black community to uh to uh white supremacy, and white supremacy in all aspects of, of life in this state.

DRM: Is James Meredith a hero?

BM: Are you asking was a he a hero?

DRM: Is he a hero?

BM: Uh yeah, look Meredith could be the most courageous figure that has ever emerged in this state. I mean uh without even uh he wouldn't admit that, I mean he has, he has strange reactions. One thinks, he thinks I am the most influential person in his life, I don't know where he gets that. But he said that. I mean, he'll say things like and I was looking through uh, uh Charles Eagles' book the great book that he uh has done. Charles is a great, is a close buddy of mine uh, and it took him 12 years to write it. Uh of, of the whole story of the Ole Miss, I mean of the Meredith crisis and uh, uh it goes on through uh, uh to uh quote from what Meredith said uh, uh in the I forget in what speech, anyway it was put on some, some uh, part of it was lifted from when he said and put on the uh, on the monument up at uh Ole Miss for him. Incidentally, Meredith that day when they had that ceremony he did not go even look at the uh, at the statue to him, so I mean, what does that mean. Anyway, but he makes some kind of a statement about driving back into Mississippi when you see the, the sign Welcome to Mississippi I mean how he felt, what feeling it gave him inside. And you would see an ambivalent uh feeling I mean that he knows this is, he's part of the land, he's part of this, the, I mean this is uh the where he's born and will died and be buried. And he recognized that. Uh but at the, he's ambivalent about whether, whether he really loves it that much I mean, or it's, it's, it's, uh it's, it's, it's not like a I mean, it's sort of a love-hate uh, uh feeling that, that he has, and uh, uh but he, he's uh he's some kind of a character I'll tell you that. And uh I uh you know it, it, it's sort of, it, it just shows how the whole, the history of the state is, the history is written by uh by uh I mean William Winter has made a lasting imprint, I mean he's the scholarly imprint on the state. I mean, and as I told you before I mean, he's the most decent man I've ever know and uh, uh and who's gone into public life uh, uh, but his impact is there but he's still sort of kept out, he's still on the uh out on out on the porch. So the people who are in the, in the house, next to the, the, the fire in the, inside the house, are these other characters that come around I mean the Ross Barnetts, and the uh, and the, and the uh, the Jim Eastlands, and, and, but you have to put, you have to put Meredith in there too because, I mean, he's uh but here you don't see anything named for Meredith. I mean there's no, I mean, you know, you have Medgar Evers Blvd, you have Medgar Evers uh, uh post office, you have Medgar Evers airport, you don't see James Meredith anywhere.

DRM: Irony of public buildings and recreational areas named for segregationists.

BM: Uh, well, you talk about a misnomer, the Ross Barnett Reservoir. He had nothing to do with the building of Ross Barnett, I mean of the reservoir. And slowly they are trying to uh take, they are now just dropping the Ross and just calling it the Barnett Reservoir, some people. And uh, now uh but you mentioned Carroll Gartin, now wait a minute now. That's, see that's the misconception a lot of people have. Carroll Gartin was not, I mean he spouted some of the, the language that had to, all politicians had to spout uh, uh to uh even run for office. But uh here's what, when Ross was running against, when they were competing for the governorship in 1959 I mean the famous remark that Ross made he said that Carroll Gartin why he's even a moderate, I mean now that was the most condemning thing you could say why he's, he's even a moderate, oh so. So I mean, so I mean Gartin is not that, uh he wasn't in the same uh, uh category.

DRM: give me a couple of sentences about Medgar Evers.

BM: Well Medgar Evers again, I mean he's a, he's a martyr to a cause that uh that is, hasn't gone away. I mean it's still uh, uh I mean the, it, it, it rises all the time I mean in another form, I mean here we are, I mean not we, I mean some of the people who are taking charge in—mostly the republicans who, who, uh, uh in charge of the Mississippi legislature and then in a dozen other legislatures uh up in the middle west and elsewhere uh trying to impose this uh voter id, photo government issue photo id, to uh vote. I mean its nothing but a, another plan uh I mean a kind of an imposition of a poll tax on uh, I mean it's, it's all part of what's written in the uh in the black code uh, of, in the 1890 Mississippi constitution which was followed many other deep south states.