

# James Meredith, J. Edgar Hoover, and the Integration of the University of Mississippi

*Rare primary sources casts new light on a historic civil rights showdown.*

- Date Range: 1961-1962
- Content: 8,792 pages
- Source Library: Federal Bureau of Investigation Library

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When James Meredith sought to legally become the first African American to attend the University of Mississippi, the duty of upholding the federal law allowing him to do so fell upon the Justice Department and the FBI. Meredith launched a legal revolt against white supremacy in the most segregated state in America and the iconic institution, Ole Miss.

Meredith's challenge triggered what Time magazine called "the gravest conflict between federal and state authority since the Civil War," a crisis that on September 30, 1962, exploded into a confrontation between university students, the community of Oxford, Mississippi, state governor Ross Barnett and a small corps of federal marshals. On October 1, President Kennedy ordered 20,000 combat infantry, paratroopers, military police and National Guard troops to Oxford to restore order, but not before two people died and dozens were injured.

## Documenting a turning point

*James Meredith, J. Edgar Hoover, and the Integration of the University of Mississippi* contains extensive FBI documentation on Meredith's battle to enroll at the University of Mississippi in 1962 and white political and social backlash. Other notable primary sources include Meredith's correspondence with the NAACP, and positive and negative letters he received from around the world during his ordeal.

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# James Meredith, J. Edgar Hoover, and the Integration of the University of Mississippi

Notable primary sources include documents tied to significant moments from the civil-rights controversy:

- NAACP's suit in the U.S. District Court alleging that the color of his skin was the only reason for Meredith not being accepted into the university
- Mississippi Gov. Ross Barnett's passing of a law that "prohibited any person who was convicted of a state crime from admission to a state school." This law was directed at Meredith, who had been convicted of "false voter registration."
- Opposition in Kennedy Administration to the use of military forces in Oxford
- Gov. Barnett's \$10,000 fine and jail sentenced for contempt, with the charges later dismissed by the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals
- Efforts by the Kennedy Administration to persuade Gov. Barnett to allow Meredith's admission and the quell the violence against African Americans in Oxford
- Presidential address via television discussing the situation in Oxford and calling on restraint
- Correspondence, memoranda and news clippings related to a variety of individuals, including Meredith, Barnett, Robert Kennedy, John Kennedy, Burke Marshall, Jack Greenburg, James McShane and Paul Johnson

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