

Battle of ole miss, a book by frank lambert essay

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" The Battle to Intergrade Ole Miss" was originally written by James Meredith. It is a very interesting book that talks about, among others, civil rights in Mississippi, and the federal law strength and the enforcement thereof. The tradition of the state was to segregate and not integrate. Racial divide in the 1960s, which compelled the author to write the book, was so visible that civil rights movements began to take shape. Civil Rights movements took time to set root in the south, more so in Mississippi. Therefore, there was need to bring the issue of racial divide to the fore in these areas.

Frank Lambert has written the subtitle " The Battle of Ole Miss" in his book which quotes William Faulkner in his second chapter. William Faulkner came up with the past is not the past, it is never dead cliché. In this cliché of a statement, he meant that the kind of racism in the blood of those who live in Mississippi run very deep and the bigotry associated with it cannot and will never be dug up easily. The kind of segregated society that is Mississippi and the race relations can be traced back to the time of pre-civil war.

This book gives the history of segregation. When the federal government came in, it enabled the drafting of a state constitution that which guaranteed the rights and freedoms of all citizens. It called for strict segregation of White Americans and African Americans. This not only gave authority to each white person to propagate white supremacy, it also gave them the authority to exercise racist practices against their African Americans. Since the state got a go ahead from the federal government to legalize such barbaric practices, it became more and more aggressive in the segregation practices. Forms of lynching even came about. It is recorded that there was lynching of a Black person once every twenty-five days. That is on average. The constitutional

authority given by the federal government was the cause of all this. Yet, it was supposed to bring some equality and sanity to the state. Mr. Lambert notes that this was a very unfortunate.

Lambert, in his book, gives us the journey of James Meredith, person who with profound vehemence fought Governor Ross Barnett for equality of all the races in the United States Constitution. His challenger (Ross Barnett) fought for the maintenance of segregation in the state laws of Mississippi. However, the main reason why Barnett wanted the traditions to be kept was because he did not want his powers to be infringed upon by the federal government. The book, while it attempts to show the intricacies and the complexities of the battles, gives the difference between Barnett and Meredith. While Barnett had the power, Meredith did not. Barnett had the tradition and state laws supporting him, Meredith did not. He also had the authority to enforce a state law which contradicted the federal law. Another difference between the two was that Barnett was wealthy, famous and had political influence. Meredith lacked all. Yet he set out a plan to influence the then President Kennedy.

A "Closed Society", according to Frank Lambert is a society which is bent on tradition. It is a society that does not allow itself to change with the changing waves of time. Though the traditions may be harmful to its wellbeing, a "closed society" is unwilling to break from it. That is what he describes Mississippi in the 1960s. This closed society is created through segregation and other divisive laws that prevent the evolution of this particular society. When these laws are created, maintaining them is not a difficult task. They are maintained by the ruling political and elite class to maintain their

prestige, power and influence. The main reason why these kinds of societies exist is because the ruling class is “closed” in their minds that the ways things are how they should be. If they changed, then their power and influence would be taken from them. Something they really hate.

There was a reason why Mississippians rejected the wave of change that was being fought by James Meredith among other civil right activists and groups. Meredith and his cohorts warned a Mississippi society that was not segregated and divided along racial lines. Both the Whites and the African Americans fought this. Though a majority of African Americans supported him because he was mainly fighting for their rights, most of them had already been disillusioned and had a mindset that made them think that they were not worthy of what Meredith and his cohorts fought for. The Whites are the ones who put up the most resistance. They went as far as lynching African Americans. This was a very sad and unfortunate part of the history of the State of Mississippi. Blacks resisted too because since Meredith and his cohorts began fighting for their rights. Their living conditions worsened and deaths became rampant as a result of this. They thus wanted normality. The White Mississippians fought because they thought that their superiority which came with power was under attack. They would not be having the political power and the influence they had before.

Frank Lambert’s book and the success of James Meredith therefore bring us to one conclusion. James Meredith’s mechanism of fighting for his rights and the rights of the Black Community at large was scholarly and deserves a place in history. The objectives set by James Meredith before he embarked on his grand plan, the author states, mainly evolved his attempt to enter the

Ole Mississippi University. He wanted to make it so public that both the President and the Attorney General would get involved. If the two were to get involved, it would mean that the State Government would be forced by the Federal Government to comply with the new laws. These new laws set integration and desegregation policies and laws.

Negroes, including James Meredith were always reminded that they were second class citizens in the South where they grew up. This greatly shaped his mindset. Things like doctors, stores and even toilets were all different. The Black people had no option of a source of income except to work for White land owners. In these farms, they were insulted, underpaid, beaten, slapped, sometimes even raped and sodomized. Many deaths occurred. It must be noted that it was illegal for a black person to own land. Laws were set that called for strict segregation of White Americans and African Americans. This not only gave authority to each white person to propagate white supremacy, it also gave them the authority to exercise racist practices against their African Americans. Since the state got a go ahead from the federal government to legalize such barbaric practices, it became more and more aggressive in the segregation practices. Forms of lynching even came about. This was but an example of the kind of sufferings that African Americans underwent.

The issue did get the attention of both the president and the attorney general. James Meredith got enrolled at the University (Ole Miss), and he was allowed to major in his subject of choice. Consequently, he was given marshals, soldiers and other law enforcers to protect him. The state got a go ahead from the federal government to legalize barbaric practices. Lynching

stopped because of the work that Meredith did. The author attributes this success to Meredith's fighting spirit and his scholarly mind. He wanted to be learned. He wanted the disintegration of the Mississippi society. He may not have succeeded in all of them. But he did succeed in attaining his objectives and aims. That is what a true civil rights champion is.