

Ole miss riot essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

On September 30, 1962, President John F. Kennedy went on television and spoke to the students of the University of Mississippi. "The eyes of the nation and all the world are upon you," he said, "and upon all of us." For the first time in the history of the United States, a young black man was trying to enroll in an all white school. Protesters had come out in full force on the university campus in the southern town of Oxford. By the time Kennedy gave his speech, rioting had begun. Federal marshals were called in to keep the peace. They used tear gas in an attempt to calm the angry crowd.

On October 1, 1962 James Meredith became the first black man to go to college at the University of Mississippi (Ole' Miss). His enrollment publicly opposed by segregationist Governor Ross Barnett, sparked tons of riot on the Oxford campus. The fight raged through the night. "This is the worst thing I've seen in forty-five years," said President Kennedy with great sadness. How had this come to pass? Why did America, "Home of the free," need to call in troops to enroll a lone African American in a public university?

In the early sixties, the South remained a highly segregated part of the country. Whites lived separately from Blacks. They were usually better off, and they went to their own schools. Many white people were comfortable with their way of life, and they were willing to fight and keep it that way. It took lots of courage of people like James Meredith to break down these racial barriers. James Howard Meredith was born June 25, 1933.

He was born in Kosciusko, Mississippi, in the fertile lowlands east of the Mississippi River. His father was a successful farmer. "James was a quiet boy, and a bit of a loner." He studies hard at school, and his father was

impressed by the amount of reading he did on his own. It was clear from an early age that James was brave. He did not scare easily. He felt no fear when walking alone through the woods near his house at night.

At the age of fifteen, James was a student at Kosciusko's Tipton High School. One day he was riding a train and was told to move to the "Black Section". Even though this was a common thing in the south, he moved anyways. Blacks lived in a segregated world, where an invisible color line separated them from whites. Black people were not allowed to use bathrooms and drinking fountains marked "Whites Only". They were not allowed to go to restaurants and couldn't rent hotels. They sat in the back of busses and trains, and even shopped at separate stores.

If a black man committed a crime, especially against a white person, he was often severely punished. If a white man committed a crime against black man, he would most likely go free. During 1950 the state of Mississippi spent \$78. 70 for each white student and only \$23. 83 for each black student. White classes were smaller and instruction was much better. Teachers at white school were paid twice as much money. Black school buildings were in terrible shape. Many black schools didn't even have desks, and books were scarce.

James was frustrated by the poor education he received in his all-black school. So, at age seventeen, he moved in with his uncle in St. Petersburg, Florida. He had been one of the smartest students in his class in Mississippi. At his new school in Florida he had to struggle to keep it up. He saw clearly what a difference a good education made.

For years, James had dreamed of going to the University of Mississippi, one of the best colleges in his state. But he knew that “separate but equal” laws would keep him in a lesser quality, all-black school. Discouraged, he decided to join the military. On July 28, 1951, he volunteered for the Air Force and put his dream on hold.

James did well in the military. He rose to the rank of staff sergeant. He met and married his wife and had a son. But all the times he served his country, he planned to return to Mississippi and go to college. It was 1960 before Meredith made it home.

While he was in the service, the landmark Supreme Court decision of 1954 had struck down the doctrine of “separate but equal”. It was now federal law that every school be integrated, or open to all races. Some people were overjoyed. Many southerners refused to obey the new law. Racism did not fade away because a law was passed.

This did not stop James. He decided to start taking classes at all-black Jackson State College. He hoped that these would prepare him for the University of Mississippi, better known as Ole’ Miss. James could have gone to a racially mixed school if he wanted too. A few days later, Meredith mailed his application. The last thing he did before he sealed the envelope was to staple a photograph of himself onto the form.

On August 18, 1963, Meredith received his diploma, taking comfort that through his actions, maybe his own son could be governor or president. And the following year, the first Mississippi schools started integrate. By 1969,

the Supreme Court had ordered all of Mississippi's schools to desegregate. At last, black children and white children went to school together.

After college, Meredith spent a year studying in Nigeria, West of Africa. He then went to law school at Columbia University, in New York City. In 1966 he published a book about his experiences called *Three Years in Mississippi*. In that same year, Meredith began a march from Memphis, Tennessee, to Jackson, Mississippi, to show that black people were free to walk through the land.

Within hours of starting out, James was shot and wounded by a sniper's bullet. Martin Luther King Jr., and other major civil rights leaders joined together in protest.

Arm in arm, they led waves of marchers to complete the James Meredith March Against Fear. James Meredith recovered from his wounds and went on to begin a career as a stockbroker. He also lectured to college students about civil rights and the burning need to address age-old racial strife.

"Meredith married Mary June Wiggins while serving in the U. S. military. They married in 1956 and had four children, one daughter and three sons. Mary died unexpectedly in 1979, and Meredith married Judy Alsobrook the following year. They live in Jackson, Mississippi." James Meredith is still alive. "Now 77, Meredith is alternately intelligent and eccentric, brainy and bizarre, a man who graduated from Columbia Law School but never bothered to take the bar exam."

“ In the 1960s, NBC named him as one of the top six black leaders in the nation.

In 1966, he did his one-man March Against Fear in Mississippi, telling reporters, “ The day for the Negro man being a coward is over.”