James Meredith and the Integration of Ole Miss
With James Meredith, Burke Marshall, and John Doar; Moderated by Juan Williams

John F. Kennedy Library and Foundation
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DEBORAH LEFF: Good evening, and welcome to the John F. Kennedy Library and Museum. I'm Deborah Leff; I'm Director of the Library, and on behalf of John Shattuck, CEO of the Kennedy Library Foundation, and our sponsors, WBUR, the MacArthur Foundation, the Lowell Institute, the Boston Globe, Boston Capital, and Boston.com, I'm delighted that you all are able to join us for this extraordinary evening.

Tonight, we are going to talk about justice. Just three weeks after President Kennedy was inaugurated, James Meredith--whom I heard referred to this morning by an observer on the scene from 40 years ago as "the most courageous man he had ever met"--James Meredith wrote to the U.S. Department of Justice, where Robert Kennedy was Attorney General, and I must say, just before we came here, James Meredith and I were downstairs in the Museum, viewing that letter. "It is with much regret," Mr. Meredith wrote, "that I present this information to you concerning myself." And then Mr. Meredith explained the problem. "I have applied for admission to the University of Mississippi."

The University of Mississippi, of course, was segregated, and that letter of Mr. Meredith's set in motion one of America's great Civil Rights battles. Forty years ago today, James Meredith went to the University of Mississippi. Mobs assembled; riots broke out. One hundred sixty U.S. marshals were wounded, 28 of them shot. Two people were killed. In Washington, President Kennedy and those around him feared that Mr. Meredith might be lynched. And as President Kennedy learned of the mobs, and the violence, he said to those in the room, "I haven't had such an interesting time since the Bay of Pigs."

Mr. Meredith persevered, and he wrote to the Attorney General again, on September fifth, 1963, this time as a graduate of the University of Mississippi. He said, "The question always arises, 'Was it worth the cost?' I believe that I echo the feelings of most Americans when I say that no price is too high to pay for the freedom of person, equality of opportunity, and human dignity." Let us go back 40 years and remember Oxford, Mississippi.

[video]

I'd like to invite our speakers to join me on the stage. [applause] We are so deeply honored to have the remarkable James Meredith with us on this day, along with two people that he singled out for praise in that 1963 letter: Burke Marshall, who headed the Civil Rights division, and his first assistant, John Doar. Both Mr. Marshall and Mr. Doar have gone on to distinguished legal careers; Mr. Marshall as the Nicholas Katzenbach Professor Emeritus of Law at Yale Law School, Mr. Doar as President of the New York City Board of Education, President of the Bedford-Stuyvesant Development Corporation, Special Counsel to the House Judiciary Committee, and an attorney in private practice. Moderating tonight's forum will be one of America's leading journalists, Juan Williams, who is senior correspondent for NPR's "Morning Edition," and author of the bestseller, Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954 to 1965. Juan?

JUAN WILLIAMS: Thank you so much, Deborah, and good evening to all of you. Mr. Meredith, I wanted to start with you, and greet you, but also to ask you to even go back before this night in 1962, to go back to 1960, because I believe you were on the campus of Jackson State University at that time, an all-black school in Mississippi, and you were called upon to stand in for someone who is honored in this building. Why don't you tell us about it?
JAMES MEREDITH: Yes, it was 1960. 1960 was the year that President John F. Kennedy was elected, and it was also the year of the first televised debates in presidential history. And all of the schools around the country were trying to duplicate those debates. Jackson State, which was the black school in Mississippi, wanted to have a television debate, but no one would take the Democrats' side. You have to know that all blacks who participated in politics in Mississippi were Republican, and no one would take the Kennedy role.

But I was the odd one on the campus. I came on the campus; I was wearing a military uniform, carrying a bamboo cane, and wearing a lovely black leather cap and a brown leather jacket. So they approached me. So I became the Kennedy in the Nixon-Kennedy debates. And what's so significant about that was that I had to learn everything about the Kennedy campaign, and also about the platforms and the other things, and I learned it the way I learned the Gettysburg Address when I was in high school. We had to learn that by heart, by memory. So I learned Kennedy's lines; I knew his lines better than he did. So, you know, I could talk for hours.

[audience laughter]

JUAN WILLIAMS: Well, don't do that. [laughter] So now, you completed three years at Jackson State before you decided-- You could have graduated from Jackson State if you simply paid a small fee, but you decided that you wanted to graduate from Ole Miss, which really was the height of sort of plantation upper-class segregationist Mississippi culture. You're frowning; am I wrong?

JAMES MEREDITH: You're just like most Northerners. [audience laughter] Mississippi had been the whipping boy for America, I think, for too long. Now, they deserved it, most of those years, and they certainly deserved it in those years. Now, I got so upset by you downing on Mississippi that I even forgot your question. [audience laughter]

JUAN WILLIAMS: Well, I never got to ask it. But the question was going to be that you had intentionally not graduated from Jackson State, so that you could make this application to the University of Mississippi, and then graduate from the University of Mississippi.

JAMES MEREDITH: Right. Of course, I'd already made the application 18 months before. And you got to remember, I went back to Mississippi in 1960 to fight a war; and to me, it was no different from World War One, World War Two, Korea, which all I'd had friends and relatives to die in, but that's what it was to me; it was a war. And I went back to Mississippi with plans devised to break the system of white supremacy. Now, the thing is, everybody was ready to acknowledge that Mississippi was a white supremacist state, and the reason they beat Mississippi so bad was because every state in America was a white supremacist state. And that's the point that I want to get over before tonight's over. I'm sorry to--

JUAN WILLIAMS: That's all right. We appreciate your defense of your home state. What was curious to me was that you had a model in mind. Ernie Green can't be with us tonight, but he was one of the Little Rock Nine, and in fact, you had witnessed what happened in Arkansas with Governor Faubus, and you've suggested to me in the past it may have inspired your thinking with regard to integrating Ole Miss.

JAMES MEREDITH: Well, it wasn't the Governor of Arkansas; it was President Eisenhower who, at that time, was President, but more significantly, he had been the biggest general the United States had ever had, including Grant, and all of them. The biggest of all was Eisenhower. And Eisenhower had called the troops out in Arkansas to support the rights of citizenship for those Little Rock Nine. And, of course, as I said, I was a soldier. My mission was war, and I knew that I would have to have an armed force on my side bigger than Mississippi had on their side. The only force in the world bigger than Mississippi's armed force was the United States government. So once Eisenhower did that, I saw the opportunity of forcing the federal government to a position where they would have to support the citizenship rights of me and all of my kind. I'm going to try to be shorter from now on.
JUAN WILLIAMS: No, that's fine. We appreciate it. This is a night for history, and for people who've made a difference, and we're blessed on this stage with three men that I think made a difference in their times. Burke Marshall, let me ask you about this night 40 years ago. Where were you?

BURKE MARSHALL: I was in the White House almost all night.

JUAN WILLIAMS: All night. And what was going on there?

BURKE MARSHALL: Well, we were connected by phone with people down at the university in Oxford, before the troops came. So that's what was going on. There were a lot of military-type decisions that had to be made, including whether or not to stimulate the troops that had been gathered at Memphis, to send them down, which was regular Army, whether or not and when to call up the National Guard, what to do about the marshals who were standing in front of the Lyceum Building, sort of defenseless. The people down there, Nick Katzenbach, who was in charge of them, asked permission for the marshals to return fire. And from the White House, that was denied, so that, although we were just sitting there in a way, there was a lot of decision-making to be made, and it was made. The President was there, the Attorney General was there.

JUAN WILLIAMS: Let's listen to an excerpt from a conversation that took place September 28th or 29th, 1962, 40 years ago, between Governor Ross Barnett of Mississippi, and President Kennedy.

[audio]

Now, Burke, if you're listening to this, were you there as the President's having this conversation with Governor Barnett?

BURKE MARSHALL: Probably.

JUAN WILLIAMS: And the President sounds as if he's a little bit unsure, as if he wants to avoid trouble, but at the same time, he's putting pressure on Governor Barnett.

BURKE MARSHALL: He's certainly trying to put pressure on the Governor. It was our wish--unfounded wish, it turned out, but our wish-- in this case, as in other cases of this sort of confrontation between the federal government and the state, that the state would undertake to preserve order within its borders, with its own facilities. And there was never any question in the President's mind or the Attorney General's mind, or anybody's mind, of delaying the entry of Mr. Meredith into the university. Never. But what was being endeavored-- and you could hear from Governor Barnett's conversation that he was a difficult fellow to talk to-- is--

JUAN WILLIAMS: That's a very polite way to put it. [audience laughter]

BURKE MARSHALL: --is an effort to get him to at least instruct the state police to either preserve or attempt to preserve order on the campus when Mr. Meredith came in and registered. And he eventually undertook to do that, but then called them off.

JUAN WILLIAMS: Now, John Doar, where were you 40 years ago tonight?

JOHN DOAR: Well, I was with James Meredith part of the time, and I was at the Lyceum Building part of the time. I came on the campus with James Meredith from Memphis. We'd been together, trying to get into university two or three times before that, once at Oxford and once at Jackson. And then one time, we came down from Memphis and got halfway, and the Attorney General turned us back and said it wasn't safe to go on. And I think we went back for two days, and then we came in on a Sunday afternoon, and there was a dormitory room reserved for Mr. Meredith, a well-secured room about 400 yards behind the Lyceum Building, and he settled there. There was an outside room where several marshals slept, and then I moved back and forth between his quarters and the Lyceum Building.
JUAN WILLIAMS: In addition to you, there was a U.S. marshal I often see in the pictures accompanying Mr. Meredith. That was James McShane.

JOHN DOAR: James McShane.

JUAN WILLIAMS: So cool to me, and I wonder-- you're with him; was Meredith really that reserved, and cool, and unflustered, by all that was taking place?

JOHN DOAR: I never saw him flustered. Never. I never saw him anxious, I never saw him nervous. He was not vocal; he wasn't outspoken; he was just determined.

JUAN WILLIAMS: Determined.

JOHN DOAR: Determined.

JAMES MEREDITH: Bad news. [audience laughter]

JUAN WILLIAMS: I'll tell you now, he was a bad man. And he still is a bad man. [laughter] Now, were you with Mr. Meredith when you had these confrontations with Governor Barnett, where Governor Barnett literally, physically sought to obstruct Mr. Meredith from registering?

JOHN DOAR: I was. I remember that when we got up to the door in Jackson, the door swung open, the Governor was there on the threshold of the door, and he had a proclamation in his hand, a scroll, and before he began to read it, he looked at me, and he looked at James Meredith, and he looked at Jim McShane, and he said, "Which one of you is James Meredith?" [audience laughter]

JUAN WILLIAMS: He was a jokester, wasn't he? [audience laughter] Now, to set the scene for the audience, when you're talking about Jackson, you're talking about the state capital, you're talking about the state office building right across from the capital, and you go into this building, you go up to the 10th floor, and attempt to register Mr. Meredith. When you go there, he reads this proclamation, he blocks you. Why, at that point, did you allow him to defy federal authority?

JAMES MEREDITH: Well, he wasn't being allowed to defy federal authority. There was no way that we were going to get into that door, no way we were going to get registered, but it was just clear that we would go back out of the building and then go back up to Oxford and register there. The only reason we went to Jackson was because the Governor had told the Attorney General that if we came to Jackson, he would be registered.

JUAN WILLIAMS: So he lied to you.

JOHN DOAR: Well, yes, he did.

JUAN WILLIAMS: Now, Mr. Meredith, you're there. Apparently Governor Barnett recognized you at this point. Did you laugh about that, by the way?

JAMES MEREDITH: Well, frankly, that wasn't the first time he'd asked that question. The first time was when we first went to Oxford, in Oxford. And he later told my wife, who was sitting out there, that that was so funny to him, that when we came back, he had to say it for television, because there wasn't no television the first time.

Now, you've got to understand more about Mississippi than I've heard anybody indicate they understand up to this point. Now, frankly, I really don't think there were two people who really understood what was going on, that was me and Ross Barnett. And actually, I credit Ross Barnett as being the reason why not a single black was ever hurt in any way during that whole time. Most of the things he did were governing, ruling. He did that, once, for example, he called all of the police officers in the state of Mississippi to Jackson to surround the Governor's mansion so the federal police wouldn't arrest him. He knew the federal police were not going to arrest him. What...
he called those people there for was to get control over their activities, so that they wouldn't go out into the counties everywhere and take matters into their own hands.

So I knew Barnett very well. Barnett was born not more than 15 miles from where my mother was born, and my mother's youngest brother knew Ross Barnett better than he did any of his own brothers and sisters. And I'm sure that you've probably read that I said I knew more about white folks than they ever knew about themselves. Well, not only was that true in my mind, I knew more about Ross Barnett than anybody else.

JUAN WILLIAMS: Now, John, when you were with Mr. Meredith on the campus that night, you told me earlier, he was not flustered in the least, but there was an atmosphere of violence, and great threats of violence all around. As James Meredith has just said, the Governor had asked for people to come to the campus. I believe James Meredith, earlier, had told me it was squirrel season, and there were guns on every truck in the state of Mississippi, all coming down into that region. Were you fearful?

JOHN DOAR: Well, I was careful. I think you have to have a picture of the geography of the campus to realize where the marshals were in front of the Lyceum Building, and where the students were, and where the people from outside were coming on the campus, and then to realize that the dormitory where Mr. Meredith was, was behind the Lyceum Building, at the back side of the campus. And so, the activity was in front of the Lyceum Building, where the marshals had formed this ring of about 75 yards around it, as if they were protecting the Lyceum Building, and whether or not the students and the people from outside thought that James Meredith was in the Lyceum Building, I don't think anybody realized where he was that night.

JUAN WILLIAMS: So he's a hidden figure, but of course, people are aware of the events that are taking place.

JOHN DOAR: Oh, yes, sure. The television started in about 4:00. When we came on the campus, it was very quiet, but the television started in that he'd come to campus, he was on the campus, and then people started to come from as far away as Alabama to the campus.

JUAN WILLIAMS: And at what point did things get violent?

JOHN DOAR: When it got dark. Before it got dark, I could remember seeing the President of the university in front of the campus, standing around with students. Students were jeering at the marshals, they were probably 10 or 12 feet behind the line of marshals, in the line of students, and there was lots of wise remarks from the students, but the President of the university was 25 feet behind the line of kids. And then it got dark, and then somebody reached over, and the first rock was thrown, and that's when it started.

JUAN WILLIAMS: Well, let's listen to another excerpt from a conversation now, taking place on this night, between President Kennedy and Governor Barnett.

[audio]

Now, Burke Marshall, the President, we hear in this excerpt, is far firmer with Governor Barnett. He seems as if he's fed up with him at this point.

BURKE MARSHALL: Well, he was. Anyone would be. But I say that Governor Barnett was totally unreliable to talk to, because he'd say anything that would protect, in his eyes, his own image, white people in Mississippi. And that image was an image of unyielding opposition to any black people getting anywhere in the society that was governed and controlled by whites. So that was his framework of his mind, if you call it a mind. I mean, it was really just reactive, a kind of framework.
Now, President Kennedy understood that perfectly well, but he was nevertheless trying to get the Governor to do things that would help with the immediate situation, as that conversation shows. And what would have helped with the immediate situation was not so much the Governor showing up, but the Governor getting the state police, and maybe other law enforcement agencies of the state, to control these students.

And, as John says, by the time dark came around, they weren't just students, there were a lot of people that had come in with pickup trucks and their squirrel guns, and so forth, and there was some shooting going on, and a lot of rock throwing, and a real riot going on.

JUAN WILLIAMS: Well, you know, what strikes me, from a historical vantage point, is the weight of history upon all of you, not just Mr. Meredith, not just John Doar, but those of you in the White House must have had a sense that here was a confrontation quickly rising between federal authority and state authority, that must have reminded everyone of what happened in the Civil War. Mr. Kennedy must have feared that things were rapidly escalating to a point of chaos.

BURKE MARSHALL: Well, I said that there was never any question at all, but that James Meredith was going to be registered at the University of Mississippi, and that he was going to be registered that day or the next. No question. And, so, it wasn't like a civil war. There was no question who was going to win. The United States Government had troops, and so it was all a question of how. And it was the desire, as I say, the wish, the hope, in all these confrontations--and this was the second or third, during the Kennedy term of office--that the people in the governments of the states down there realized that they had to take on whatever law enforcement problems grew up in the course of this dramatic shift, in the dramatic rent in the system of oppression of black people.

JUAN WILLIAMS: A few moments ago, you said that the President, or maybe you didn't say the President, you said the White House, denied U.S. marshals authority to return fire.

BURKE MARSHALL: Right.

JUAN WILLIAMS: That would suggest to me that the President was fearful this thing was going to become all-out war.

BURKE MARSHALL: Well, it was going to be nastier. But war, you have to have two sides, and this was a mob, and, at worst, a bunch of deputy sheriffs from around the county, and an army. And the army was the United States Army, so you can't have a war with your own people, when your own people are a ragtag mob of rioters. So it's not a lasting thing; it's a question of how bad it would be during that day, that night, that next couple of days. That's all it was.

JUAN WILLIAMS: And the worst-case scenario, in my mind, and I wonder if it occurred to all of you in the oval office that night, was that Mr. Meredith would be killed.

BURKE MARSHALL: No, for reasons that John can explain better than I can, and maybe Mr. Meredith, that didn't seem to be a possibility. He was in a place which was sufficiently protected, and it was unknown to this mob, though, that they were sort of misled in the sense they saw these marshals lined up in front of the Lyceum Building. Well, there was nothing in the Lyceum Building. But, to them, the Lyceum Building, and the line of marshals in front of it, were the enemy. So that's what they were attacking. They weren't really attacking James Meredith; they were attacking these marshals.

JUAN WILLIAMS: Mr. Meredith?

JAMES MEREDITH: Yes, this is sort of moving away from what we're talking about, but I really need to say this, and I want to. No question in my mind that the most important thread that caused me to be able to go to the University of Mississippi and get a degree from the University of Mississippi was Mr. Burke Marshall. And about a week after I sent my application in, I talked to...
him on the telephone, and I can't say whether he initiated it, or the person that I spoke to from his office initiated it. But as a result of that telephone conversation, I wrote the United States Justice Department and it was hand-carried, I suppose, to Mr. Marshall. And that letter is downstairs in the Bobby Kennedy room, and I absolutely consider it to be the most important letter I ever wrote, but more significantly, it was who got it, and that was Mr. Marshall. If we had a week, we could go into all the reasons why, but at this point, I'll just say [that].

Now, the second most important person was Mr. John Doar. It's amazing that those two people are here tonight, and still living, for me to be able to say that to them. But, now, Mr. Doar indicated that I didn't show fear. Believe me, the fact that he never showed fear, and that James McShane never showed fear, was certainly not a negative impact on me. [audience laughter] According to Katzenbach, I didn't have sense enough to be afraid, but I just wanted to particularly bring that out about these two gentlemen.

JUAN WILLIAMS: John Doar, what were your orders from the White House, in terms of your activities on the campus that night, beyond not returning fire?

JOHN DOAR: Well, I think it was just to keep the White House advised of where James Meredith was, what kind of activity was going on around the building where he was sleeping, what was my impressions of what was going on at the Lyceum Building. That's as I remember it.

JUAN WILLIAMS: Were you up all night?

JOHN DOAR: I think I was. Yes, I'm sure I was.

BURKE MARSHALL: May I say that the order not to return fire was always with the addendum that unless it's necessary to protect Mr. Meredith.

JUAN WILLIAMS: And Mr. Meredith, you were sleeping.

JAMES MEREDITH: Well, that's right. [audience laughter] And I know you got a lot of good-hearted people in here, and they want to hear good-hearted, nice things. But I was at war, and what soldiers do, they kill enemies. And if there's anything that was really surprising to me about the whole Mississippi thing, was that I survived alive. I mean, if I had been me, I would have certainly killed me if I'd been on the other side.

So the reason I was sleeping was because I had already accomplished my mission. My mission was to force the federal government-- and because I'm in the Kennedy Library, I won't use that name-- into a position where they had to use organized violence to protect my rights of citizenship. And I had accomplished that days before. I mean, Mr. Doar was in court at least four or five times, which, he could have only been there if the government hadn't already come in. But I had already seen the soldiers assembling up in a militant Air Force base in Memphis, and so I knew what the deal was. I knew also that the Kennedy administration wanted very much to be reelected, and they didn't want to offend the South too badly, but they had already made the commitment.

And I can't overstress the significance of using organized violence to protect me and my kind, and our rights of citizenship. And I'm going to work the rest of my living life to try to make all Americans understand what I'm talking about, because most Americans only deal with this emotional thing. And that, to me, is not worth dealing with.

JUAN WILLIAMS: John Doar, on that night, two men died. Were you aware at the time that violence had escalated to the point where people were dying?

JOHN DOAR: Well, I think I was. I think the one thing you've kind of overlooked is the fact that the marshals did use tear gas, and so that the area in front of the Lyceum Building was filled with tear gas. And as soon as the rocks started to be thrown fairly heavily, the marshals did release
tear gas, and so that there was an area in front of the line of marshals that was pretty clear of people. And the persons that were killed, as I remember it, were a considerable distance behind the line of where the marshals were.

And I can't tell you that there was rifle fire, or lots of shots going back and forth, because I don't remember that that way at all. But we could discern that there was a continual buildup of people out in the night to the east of where the marshals were. And it wasn't getting any better, and they weren't getting more people out there. There weren't more people coming on to campus. We could hear it from the radio, reports of more and more people pouring into the town of Oxford. And at some point, maybe three or four hours after it got dark, when it just looked like it probably would break wide open, then the state patrol came on the campus, and came up the road in front of the Lyceum Building, with maybe 10 or 12 or 15 police cars, and that quieted down. And then, within another 40 minutes or so, the Army came on the campus.

JUAN WILLIAMS: In fact, tomorrow, at the University of Mississippi, they're going to have a commemoration of these events. And among the people that will be honored were men who were in the National Guard and the Army, who sought to protect Mr. Meredith—some of them Mississippians, I will say, for Mr. Meredith's benefit, in defense of the great state of Mississippi. But I'm wondering if, at this point, you were aware how many men, for the National Guard, for the Army, you had in defense of yourself and Mr. Meredith?

JAMES MEREDITH: Well, you mean in numbers? Under the General of the National Guard, there were thousands, probably 15,000 soldiers.

JUAN WILLIAMS: And those 15,000 were on the campus?

JAMES MEREDITH: No, no. The Army and the National Guard did not get onto the campus as quickly as I think President Kennedy and the Attorney General hoped they would. They moved much slower, so my recollection is that they didn't get onto the campus until somewhat after midnight, maybe well after midnight. And some time before that, the state patrol came on the campus, and that was the sequence as I recall it.

JUAN WILLIAMS: Burke Marshall, at what point were you in Washington convinced that this was quieted down, you had no more need to worry, and you were able to leave the White House?

BURKE MARSHALL: Not that night. It took the Army getting there ... One of the dramatic and discouraging parts of the night, in the point of view of the White House, at least, was the slowness with which the regular Army responded to a presidential order given through the Pentagon, to move from Memphis down to Oxford. And I remember very clearly that we had Cy Vance, who was Secretary of the Army at the time, on the telephone, and he'd say, “Well, they're getting in their planes.” Well, they weren't getting in their planes, because they had forgotten their gas masks, or something. And so, two, three hours would go by, and “Where are they?” “They're getting in their planes.” And that kind of delay that was misreported by the Army to the President during the smaller hours of that night were very troublesome. I mean, this was just before the Cuban Missile Crisis, of course. So, for reasons unconnected with Oxford, that was very distressing to the President and the government.

JUAN WILLIAMS: So, you stayed there all night, into the morning?

JAMES MEREDITH: Yeah. I did. The President went to bed at one point. [audience laughter] The Attorney General was there all night.

JUAN WILLIAMS: Robert Kennedy was there all night with you.

JAMES MEREDITH: Mm-hmm.

JUAN WILLIAMS: So at what time do you get up, Mr. Meredith?
JAMES MEREDITH: I guess it was about a quarter to eight, or maybe 7:30.

JUAN WILLIAMS: And immediately?

JAMES MEREDITH: We went over to the Lyceum, the marshals came in, and told me-- or Mr. Doar, I don't remember which one-- that we could go register. So we went out to get in the car, and it was the same marshal's car we'd been riding in. All of the windows had been shot out, so we had to go back in the dorm and get some blankets to put over the seat, so the glass wouldn't cut us. And then we drove on over to the Lyceum Building, and, actually, at that time it was later that I learned that that's where all of the rioting had taken place, because there wasn't nobody there when I went over there but soldiers. So we went inside and registered.

JUAN WILLIAMS: John, do you remember it just that way?

JOHN DOAR: I do. There was a small room inside the first floor of the Lyceum Building, and the registrar was there behind the desk. He didn't look very happy about it, but we went in the room, Mr. Meredith sat down, and they went through the procedures right then and there. Probably 8:30 in the morning.

JUAN WILLIAMS: No sign of the Governor at this point?

JOHN DOAR: No. No one, no. And no sign of the President of the university.

BURKE MARSHALL: We had gone through court proceedings, sort of step-by-step, contempt order by contempt order, against the officials of the university, and the board of the university, and the Governor, and the Lieutenant Governor. And gotten from the fifth circuit contempt orders against each of these groups. And they gradually, one by one, tried to purge themselves of contempt, by agreeing that Mr. Meredith would be registered in the university. Of course, it was totally preposterous lawsuit for the university to take the position as it did for years, months, in court, that their refusal to register James Meredith had nothing to do with his race. And that's what was preposterous about it, that they took that position. Anyway--

JUAN WILLIAMS: Well, hang on a second. I think you should explain for everyone that their theory was that the government was improperly interfering with the sovereign rights of the state of Mississippi.

BURKE MARSHALL: If they had a theory, I suppose that's a good statement of it, Juan. [audience laughter]

JUAN WILLIAMS: Well, we're trying. Now, James Meredith, when I last saw you, you told me something that stays in my mind. I suppose it'll stay there for the rest of my life. You said that as you came out of the registrar's office, you saw a black man. You thought this strange, maybe even a little alarming. What happened then?

JAMES MEREDITH: Well, he was the only person in the building besides my group, and I thought it was odd, but as I walked past him, he had a broom under his arm, and he twisted his body and touched me with the broom. Well, he looked at me, and the message was very clear: "We are watching out for you. You don't have to worry about nothing." And you got to understand, at least 60% of the people working at the University of Mississippi were black. So that was a very, very important occasion in my life.

A lot of people don't realize, change is something that no one ought to experience. When I made application for Ole Miss, at least 95% of every black in the state was against it, particularly if they were middle class or high echelon black. I mean, because they felt threatened. So, for the most part, I didn't have any way to know how the ordinary people like this janitor felt. But when he did that thing, that was probably the most important thing to me that had occurred to that point.
JUAN WILLIAMS: Every black guy in Mississippi at the university was going to be looking out for you.

JAMES MEREDITH: Absolutely. I didn't have to worry about nothing. That was the message.

JUAN WILLIAMS: John, did you accompany him to his first class?

JOHN DOAR: Well, we tried not to accompany him in the sense of to walk right with him. We had probably one or two marshals 40 paces ahead of him, and maybe I was 40 paces behind, another marshal 40 paces behind. We never went into the classrooms with Mr. Meredith. I always ate with him, the first three weeks that I was there, and we had one somewhat unpleasant incident in the cafeteria, but other than that--

JUAN WILLIAMS: Well, wait a second. You can't just do that; you've got to tell us what happened. [laughter] Tell us what happened.

JOHN DOAR: Well, we go in, and it's a big dining room where you go up and you get your tray, and you get your food, and you go to a table. And Mr. Meredith and I always sat together, and usually we weren't bothered. But one night, a bunch of white kids started to gather around us, and jeer, and shout, and the crowd got bigger and bigger, but just as soon as that happened, the marshals, who were probably just outside the cafeteria came in and dispersed them, and that just went on. And other than that, I don't recall of there being any difficulty of Mr. Meredith attending the classes.

JUAN WILLIAMS: Mr. Meredith?

JAMES MEREDITH: Yes, on that evening business. I always went through the same line, and the line on my line was always much longer than the line on the other side, because everybody knew the best food was going to be on my line. [audience laughter]

JUAN WILLIAMS: Burke Marshall, now that the night of crisis had passed, what was the role that the White House and the Justice Department played in monitoring the situation in Oxford?

BURKE MARSHALL: There was really nothing for the White House to do then. The first troops that came on, I think, were National Guard troops. And so that they had re-federalized in order to be under the command of the President and not of the Governor. And then there was the regular Army. And so there was a question of how long they'd be there, and what they'd do there, and you know, in a way, they didn't have anything to do. They rode around in their Jeeps, and not just in Oxford, but around there, maybe. John and James Meredith know better than I do what they were doing.

But there was a question of when to pull them out, and then the Cuban Missile Crisis came right along, and when that came right along, there was a need to move a lot of troops down to staging areas in Florida, and close to Cuba, and that necessitated alerting the court not to issue any orders that would interfere with that movement. And I think that affected the decisions with respect to the troops that were in Mississippi, because of Ole Miss. You know, the span was just three weeks.

JUAN WILLIAMS: I just want you to be clear with us. So the idea was that you didn't want the courts to issue any orders that would have limited the ability of the troops who were on the campus at Ole Miss from moving down to Florida?

BURKE MARSHALL: Right. Or other troops.

JUAN WILLIAMS: But you wanted them moved.

BURKE MARSHALL: Well, I didn't want them moved, but the President wanted them moved, yeah. Some of them. I mean, who would get moved was up to the Pentagon, but they didn't know
what they were going to do in response to the Cuban Missile Crisis. But one of the possibilities that was under consideration was an invasion of Cuba, and you can't do that like this; you have to get prepared to do it. And so that required troop mobilizations in places that were easy to use for an invasion of Cuba. So that I think that affected the military planning, at least, with respect to what to do about that situation. As far as the university was concerned, by that time there was no need for all those troops around there, at least in my opinion, and I think in the President's opinion, and the Pentagon's opinion.

JUAN WILLIAMS: Maybe not John Doar and James Meredith's opinion.

BURKE MARSHALL: Well, I think it was, really. I don't think that you thought they needed troops all over the place. You can ask them.

JUAN WILLIAMS: Well, they're shaking their heads in the negative; is that right, gentlemen?

JAMES MEREDITH: No, I don't know what my position would have been, but my official position always was that we never needed the troops. But I wouldn't have gone, had not the government assured me that they would use organized violence to protect my rights as a citizen.

JUAN WILLIAMS: John?

JOHN DOAR: Well, when you talk about the army, as I think back on it, there were those who said afterwards that what the federal government should have done was to send the 20,000 troops in, right from the very beginning. And that it was an error in judgment on the part of the Justice Department and the President to try to carry it out as Burke has suggested, that it would be best for everybody if the state of Mississippi would take control of the police power, and exercise the police power, to maintain order.

And it seems to me that that judgment of Burke's, and the Attorney General's, and the President, was absolutely right, because the Army got there soon enough to interpose itself between all of the rednecks that were coming from Hattiesburg and Mobile, and Selma, and Birmingham, and Jackson, and Yazoo City, and wherever else, and it took them some time to get to Oxford. And at the same time, it was made clear to everybody that the federal government had given the state of Mississippi every opportunity to carry out the law itself, before it put in the federal troops.

And I think that was a significant breakthrough, because we always thought that if you sent the troops down to Mississippi, to occupy the state of Mississippi, sure, you'd keep order, and it was much more difficult to protect the SNCC kids, and the white kids who were supporting the SNCC kids, in 70 counties in Mississippi, than it was to protect James Meredith at the University of Mississippi. Because you weren't going to be able to tell the SNCC kids, "You can't go here, and you can't go there, and you can't go here." They're going to go. But if the policy and the strategy had been just to pour the federal Army, the U.S. Army, into Mississippi, and occupy it, I think that a time would come when the Army would be withdrawn, and we'd be back right where we started. And so, every chance that came was to give the state of Mississippi the opportunity to do the right thing.

James MacShane was indicted in the state of Mississippi, after the night at Oxford. There were some people that argued that we should not go to Mississippi and take on that indictment in the state of Mississippi, that we should seek an injunction from the Court of Appeals. But the Attorney General decided, no, we'd go back and take it on in Mississippi.

That, to me, was another good decision on the part of the federal government, and I would really like to echo what James Meredith's said about Burke. I think from the very beginning, there was never any doubt in Burke's mind that James Meredith was going to go to university. And he was articulating this in his quiet way, if the question was asked of him, from back in the spring of that year. Harold Greene, subsequently, became a federal judge, and Burke and I went up to Newark
to meet with the Civil Rights commission, Father Hessburg's group. And, afterwards, we stopped and had a cup of coffee at a restaurant at the train station.

Harold Green-- this was in the spring-- Harold Green said to Burke, "Meredith's not going to get into the-- The federal government's not going to put Meredith in." Burke made it very clear that Harold Green was wrong.

If any of you are interested in history, you ought to read the transcript of the proceedings before the full circuit court, fifth circuit, down in New Orleans, when the circuit court entered their order, directing the state of Mississippi to admit James Meredith. And during that hearing, Judge Tuttle-- Burke was representing the government-- Judge Tuttle said to Mr. Marshall, "You know, the time has come where the judiciary can only do so much. Now tell me, Mr. Marshall, what's the federal government going to do to enforce the order of the court?" And Burke made it absolutely clear, in a marvelous speech, a marvelous reply, that there was no doubt that James Meredith was going to enter the University of Mississippi.

And so I think the strategy and the vision of how to bring this about, without having an open revolution, without having a lot of people killed, was remarkable. And the strategy was really "try to bring about this change of second-class citizenship for blacks in the South without anybody getting killed." We weren't successful at that. But we worked awfully hard to carry out that objective, and to me that made a lot of sense.

JUAN WILLIAMS: Well, let me ask people in the audience to join us now in asking questions of these three distinguished gentlemen. We have two microphones set up, and if you would please rise and identify yourself, and ask a brief question, we'd appreciate it. Before I allow the first question to be asked, I want to come back to Mr. Meredith, and ask him about that entire year at the University of Mississippi. We heard about the lunchroom incident. Was it otherwise without problems, and do you remember with relish being a student at Ole Miss?

JAMES MEREDITH: I never considered myself a student. I was a soldier and a politician, at best. In fact, it would have been a total insult to me to have considered myself a student. My goal was to break the system of white supremacy, and to set the groundwork for making me and my kind full first-class citizens in the United States. [applause]

JUAN WILLIAMS: First question, please.

GERALD GILL: My name is Gerald Gill. Mr. Meredith, thank you. And you had more or less anticipated what I was going to say, because my comment was, for example, the reaction of students and faculty. There are pictures of you in the cafeteria with some of the white faculty members of the University of Mississippi, which supported you individually. But I also wanted to know the reaction of students. For example, there was an article in yesterday's Washington Post, by the editor of the University of Mississippi's newspaper, in which he had written an editorial, and her responses to it. But also, one of the students at the University of Mississippi at that time has never commented on his experiences, and that was Trent Lott. I was just wondering, at least in terms of, what was the relationship of students, either in terms of the classes, or to your presence on campus?

JAMES MEREDITH: I really couldn't honestly answer that question. I mean, I have read in other sources what Trent Lott did, but I never knew Trent Lott existed in the world until he was a Senator. I didn't even know him when he was a Congressman. My goal was to distinguish no one. I could not distinguish the ones who cursed me every time they saw me, or the ones who tried to be nice. I deliberately did not, because I wanted them to be able, as hundreds of them do now, to come up to me and say what they felt now. And that happens almost on a daily basis now. I mean, people tell me how they felt then, how they feel now. And that was my goal. So this was never anything personal or emotional with me, never. I mean, it was, to me, a war, and I don't go into war unless I intend to win it.
JUAN WILLIAMS: Now when you say, "So people could come up and tell you how they felt then, and how they felt now," I'm just assuming-- correct me if I'm wrong-- that people come up to you and say, "I recognize the sins of my ways."

JAMES MEREDITH: They say the best thing that ever happened in Mississippi was my going to the University of Mississippi. And I believe them.

JUAN WILLIAMS: You know, before we go on, we should mention that your son recently graduated from the University of Mississippi as the top student-- top doctoral student, I believe--in the business school. How'd you feel about that?

JAMES MEREDITH: Well, I didn't want to give my propaganda speech on Mississippi, but I'm going to have to now. [audience laughter] You see, my son graduating and getting a doctorate's degree was of no surprise. He had not made but one B since he was 12 years old, and that was his second year at Harvard. Now, he finished at the top of his class at Harvard, and what was significant about Ole Miss was that the faculty and staff voted that he was the most outstanding student in the school.

I don't think that would have happened at Harvard, or no other state in this union. And that is where I'm interested in going now. I'm glad that the Burke Marshalls of the world were in position to do the things that led to a successful thing there. But white supremacists still reign in America. The President of the United States today, in my opinion, is a white supremacist. [applause] Now, most people are satisfied for some white folks to be ready to kick me only twice, whereas they think somebody in Mississippi would want to kick me all of 10 times. But you understand, in my view, either we are full first-class citizens, or we are better off not being no citizens at all. And that's what my goal is, to make me and my kind full first-class citizens all over America. [applause]

JUAN WILLIAMS: Now, I want a quick answer on this one, Mr. Meredith, but I imagine some people would be upset to hear what you said about our President, so why did you say that?

JAMES MEREDITH: Why did I say it? Because I genuinely believe it's true. I mean, I don't think his daddy was, but every President of the United States, up to John F. Kennedy, made a speech acknowledging their belief in white supremacy. John Kennedy was the first President in American history that didn't do it. Now, I don't know who fathered him, but Ronald Reagan definitely made it clear that he was a white supremacist. And you know, I've been really concerned about George Bush the President growing up in Texas, because I'm not at all sure that it just didn't get ingrained in him. But this white supremacy thing's got to go, if I'm still living. [applause]

PETER GIARDIN: My name is Peter Giardin; question for Mr. Meredith was, it seems like it was one of the first battles in a long series, to get into the university. What was life like in the ensuing months after being admitted? Were students openly hostile to you? Was there more difficult engagements? And, for Mr. Marshall, do you think that the Cuban Missile Crisis helped defuse this whole situation, to be a little bit more peaceful, before it boiled to the surface again?

JAMES MEREDITH: I was at war, and you say, I'm not really sure. I think the person that probably understood me better than anybody else was Mr. Doar, because he spent more time with me than anybody else during that time. But I don't think he ever really understood too much about-- You see, everybody talked about the way I looked. Now, I look that way on purpose, deliberately, because when I went to the University of Mississippi, I'd already read all of the great books of the western world. I knew every technique used in Greece and Rome to acquire power. And the way I looked at the University of Mississippi was the same way that Machiavelli described how the Pope looked the last time the Catholic armies conquered Rome. The Pope had his army stopped at the edge of the city, and he walked alone into the center of Rome, and I knew the power of a lack of fear whenever everybody else is supposed to be afraid. I knew that would scare the life out of everybody that saw that, and I know it's true, because the Lieutenant Governor, and all of the state troopers, were shaking like leaves on a tree. And I know it was
because of the way I conducted myself, and it was deliberate. I guess I ain't never really said this before. You understand, there were no accidents in my life.

So, probably why I haven't said this before, because I wasn't as old as I am now, and I know that most good people-- I got to say this one, you shouldn't have done that. I mean, I am insulted then by the Civil Rights division of the government, I'm insulted now, because what that means is second-class citizenship for me and my kind. "We've got to help these poor folk." And to me, that is a great insult. Because I'm a citizen of America, and I ain't going to say no more. [applause]

JUAN WILLIAMS: All right. Next question, please. And I think I'm going to ask that no one else join those who are standing for questions, because we have only limited time, so this will be the-- We have six people standing, there will be six more questions.

STEVE GOODE: Good evening. My name is Steve Goode; I'm a teacher at the John D. O'Bryant School of Mathematics and Sciences. My question is actually to Mr. Meredith and Mr. Burke. You mentioned several times that you were a soldier, and I'm just curious how a soldier could fight a war, if he sends his troops away. And Mr. Marshall said something about sending the troops away. I'm quite sure that my math is right, but there were enough troops to at least leave a thousand or so and protect you. And I think that the climate of the time, that certainly one would have to think safety was a factor. So the question is, do you think that the issue of the troops who were sent away, more of something Kennedy wanted to do, to get reelected, because that was very important?

JUAN WILLIAMS: Why don't we let Mr. Burke Marshall respond to this?

BURKE MARSHALL: Well, the troops were there for several weeks after the riot on the campus, so that they weren't sent away suddenly like that. They were around for quite a while. And when they finally were pulled out, it was because they were unnecessary. There was nothing for them to protect against, going on, that was known. Of course, anything could have happened, but they were not suddenly withdrawn the next day, or something like that. Is that responsive to what you had in your mind?

STEVE GOODE: Well, I just find it hard to believe that the climate of the time just went away.

JUAN WILLIAMS: Well, let me ask James Meredith to respond to this idea. When you were aware that the troops were being withdrawn, did it cause you any discomfort?

JAMES MEREDITH: Only thing that ever caused me any discomfort was when they took the black troops out of the ranks. In fact, the first news conference I called was to force the federal government to put the black troops back in the ranks. A hundred years before, they had segregated the military. And the people in control of the Army-- I know I'm in the Kennedy Library, so I ain't going to say nothing-- deliberately ordered all of the commanders to take their black troops out of the ranks. Now, the most thing I like is that some of the commanders didn't follow the command from Washington, from the Pentagon, but nothing was more upsetting to me, and to my knowledge, within two days after my press conference, they put them back in the ranks, and they have never been taken out of American military ranks again. [applause]

JUAN WILLIAMS: John Doar, before we move on, were you concerned when the military was withdrawn?

JOHN DOAR: Well, I don't think that we've got the picture straight. The Army was there the first week after Mr. Meredith was on the campus, the second week. Nobody moved all the troops out of Oxford until sufficient time had gone by that it was clear that local law enforcement would be able to keep order. So it never was a big matter with me, or with anyone in the Civil Rights division. Civil Rights lawyers were on the campus for six months afterwards, and they were reporting to Washington every day as to what the situation was. There were marshals there around; they were reporting. If there was any indication that there was any kind of trouble
baking, the government would have reacted immediately. So that this business of “pulling the troops out” is something that is not within my recollection.

JUAN WILLIAMS: All right; let’s take another question.

DONALD BYRD: My name is Donald Byrd; I'm originally from St. Louis, Mississippi. And I was one of those guys sitting in Hattiesburg, Mississippi that night, discussing whether we were going to go to Oxford or not. And I'd like to say that I kept us from going out of some great idealism, but I kept us from going out of the fact that I owned the car and I didn't want to drive it for six hours to go up there and get it shot up.

I want to make a comment to Mr. Doar. I was a journalism major at Mississippi Southern College, which is the University of Southern Mississippi now. And I was there that night. We spent all night talking about the whole implications of things.

But one of the things that happened to me at that school is I was mandated to go to the voter rights trials that you conducted in Hattiesburg, at the federal courthouse. And I experienced an epiphany by going there. I had never, ever in my life understood what all the hoopla was about, and how you presented that case, and bringing in those educated black people who qualified in every possible way to be able to vote, and counterposing them with literally ignorant people who had no education, and no ability to be able to understand the constitution of Mississippi, which is one of the things they had to be able to talk about. And I experienced probably one of the most fundamental changes in my life by watching you do that. You had a lot darker hair then, and I had a lot more hair then, but I came here tonight at my wife's urgence to say thank you, sir. I appreciate it very much. [applause]

JUAN WILLIAMS: John, it's touching to hear something like that, but I wonder if you even remember doing that?

JOHN DOAR: Well, sure I remember the Hattiesburg trial, and what I think when this gentleman spoke was the fact that the young lawyers, men and women, in the Civil Rights division are not as great heroes as James Meredith, are not as great heroes as the SNCC kids, but they paid their dues during the 60s, slowly, steadily, county by county, taking on the registrars, taking on the sheriffs with respect to intimidation. And little by little, we helped to teach the country that no matter how well-educated a black person was in Mississippi, it was very unlikely that he would get a chance to vote, and if you could breathe and were white, you voted. And that message, over a four- or five-year period, in case after case similar to the Hattiesburg case, helped to change the country, until the Voting Rights Act in 1965 was passed, and that really broke the back of the caste system in the south. And so, speaking for all of us in the Civil Rights division, it was a matter of considerable satisfaction that we were all part of that.

JUAN WILLIAMS: Let's take another question.

DAVID COSTA: My name is David Costa, and I've been sitting here tonight, and I just wanted to first say thank you for your courage and determination at the time that we are describing here, then, and for your eloquence here tonight. In the course of the description, the audio transcript we heard about Governor Barnett, he sounded as though he was determined to be a sort of human barrier of the ultimate registration of Mr. Meredith. But by the time it came to actually register, it seems as if he was nowhere to be seen. I was wondering, was there a sort of a critical juncture--a conversation, an event-- that was necessary to essentially have him stand aside?

JUAN WILLIAMS: Burke Marshall, do you remember what happened? Why did the Governor seemingly disappear?

BURKE MARSHALL: Well, it was at least in part-- correct me if I've got this wrong, John-- but it was at least in part that the government obtained a contempt order against the Governor that levied a fine of 10,000 dollars a day against him personally, if he interfered with the registration of
James Meredith at the University of Mississippi. Now, it may be to some people that 10,000 dollars a day doesn't sound like much, but it accumulates very fast. [audience laughter] And I think the Governor was affected a lot by that order. So that's one reason, at least. Another reason is that, to use a James Meredith image of war, he was beaten.

JUAN WILLIAMS : You mean the Governor was beaten.

BURKE MARSHALL: The Governor was beaten, yeah. He was through, at least on this issue of an unbroken line of white supremacy. Now, that didn't integrate the state of Mississippi by any means; it didn't integrate the schools, it didn't integrate the lunch counters, it was just about the University of Mississippi. But at least in that symbolic and very important symbol of the state of Mississippi, he was beaten.

JUAN WILLIAMS : Let's take another question.

JOSEPH ZELLNER: Thank you. I'm Joseph Zellner, of Williamstown, New Jersey. I'm presently here in Massachusetts. Gentlemen, I appreciate the opportunity to hear you. Thank you. For Mr. Meredith, this is a question for you. It's about another event in your life, which was a marked event in my life also, probably much more so yours than mine. But nonetheless, in my small frame, it was very important, because in 1966, I had been accepted and was planning to attend a small college in Chattanooga, Tennessee. And I think I'm one of those Northerners that you accused Mr. Williams of being, because from Williamstown, New Jersey, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, it all looks the same when you look down there. In your march for freedom, I believe, your march across Mississippi, you were shot in the summer of 1966. And I would ask if you would comment on that event, because in my family-- cousins, aunts, and uncles, parents-- "Boy, what are you going to school down there for?" 1966 for me was a time-stopping moment, and certainly it was for you, and I would ask you to comment on your love for your home state, and then that particular event, if you would.

JAMES MEREDITH: Well, strange as it may seem, the fact that I was shot and didn't die, along with who shot me, was the real cause for the success of what I started out to do. Now what I started was a war against fear. Now that's very important, because I never participated in the Meredith March, because "march" means "protest." War means exercise your right as a citizen, an individual citizen. And James Meredith do not protest. Don't nobody exist in America big enough for me to protest.

But now, the objective was to challenge that all-pervasive fear. White supremacy was sustained by fear and violence, and the threat of violence. Now, Mr. Doar already mentioned, in 1965, the Voting Rights Bill was passed. That was one year before I conducted the war. But still, less than 8,000 people out of over 400,000, after all the work he had done, and all the others, were registered to vote in Mississippi. And I knew the reason was fear.

Now, first of all, I was going to challenge that fear, and I think I would have succeeded, if the man that had shot me had been from Mississippi, or the other I'd have got killed, one or the other. But the fact that he was not from Mississippi, he was the first white man in Mississippi history to go to Parchment Prison for shooting a black. And, within a very short time, the federal government had did the next thing that I knew they had to do. You see, in 1964, they passed a Civil Rights act that included the voting rights position, but nothing to back it up. The reason why, a year after I got shot, was because the federal government used organized violence on our side after that. When I got shot, there were scores of law people there: FBI, everything. They could protect the man that shot me because he was white, but they had no authority to protect me. Now, they don't talk about it, like they don't talk about a whole lot of things, but after I was shot, the next year, they passed legislation that authorized the United States organized violence to protect the rights of me and my kind. That's why 300,000 people within a year could be registered.

JUAN WILLIAMS : Let me take another question.
DANNY MAE JAMES: Good evening, Mr. Meredith. I am Danny Mae James, and I'm from Mississippi, and during the time when you made this great effort in entrance into Ole Miss, I was probably just one year out of high school. I'd like to just commend you as well as your wife for being here with us, so that I could put my eyes on you in the natural.

You have mentioned, on several occasions here, two key things that I really am interested in, and one is white supremacists, and the other one is to, as I shall say it, to set us free from oppression. When you say, "our people," I certainly include me into your "our people." I'd like to know, in America, where we are to be equal, can you share your plan for, somehow within our lifetime, making the world realize that we are no longer a third of a person, that we are a full live intelligent human being, and that when there is ever a crisis anywhere in the world, that someone who looks like you and I can speak and address the issue as well. Would you please tell me how you are going to move with your plan to make an additional difference? I believe you can do it, because you've done other things. Would you please help--

JAMES MEREDITH: Well, thank you for that opportunity. I was going to save this until tomorrow, when I got back into Mississippi.

JUAN WILLIAMS: Oh, say it now.

JAMES MEREDITH: Now. 9-11 is a year behind us now. I guarantee you, for the first six months after 9-11, you didn't hear one peeping word out of any blacks, so-called, either. The first one to say anything was Minister Farrakhan. And he cloaked it completely in religion. Now why was that? In every American crisis, until this last one, all of the blacks, in order to prove their loyalty to America, had to take the position as one college president told me, "Yaz, I's a nigger." Now they didn't make us in World War II, particularly say, "I'm a nigger," but they made us acknowledge second-class citizenship. We had to acknowledge that other people had rights that we don't have. They did it in Korea, they did it again in Vietnam, and every black male over 20 years old was scared to death that the country was going to make them say, "Yaz, I's a nigger," in order to prove that they are loyal to this country. Now there's only one way that we can become full first-class citizenship, and that is, if that's what the whites in America decide. It ain't really up to us; it's up to white America.

And the last thing I'm going to say, the reason why I'm so happy about what's happening at Ole Miss, 40 years after I went there, is because the leadership of that school, the chancellor, and others, but it's also happening all over Mississippi, but particularly at that school, the chancellor made a statement recently that he believed in equality for everybody. When we get George Bush to say that, and all of the other whites take that and be serious about it, then and only then can we be complete full citizens. Until that time, I'm going to have to remain a soldier, and I'm going to have to try to teach everybody that I'm influencing to be a soldier, until that day comes. [applause]

JUAN WILLIAMS: Our final question of the night comes from the next generation, Mr. Meredith.

BRIAN COLLINS: My name is Brian Collins, and I was just wondering, if you could, would you do it again?

JAMES MEREDITH: Well, as I said, the only thing that disappoints me is that it's 40 years before I can feel safe in saying what my mission is. So, if I had to do it all over again, I would rush everything. I probably wouldn't still be living, but I would rush everything. I think I've taken too long to do the things that have to be done.

And I want to say this, particularly to this young man. You understand, the only thing that I'm trying to do is to make the Founding Fathers' ideal become a reality. [applause] I recommend that everybody in here go back and read the Constitution of the United States. It is written in such a way only one name is used to describe people, and that word is citizen. And even after they had passed the Constitution, General Washington insisted on one class of citizenship. Indeed, the reason for the rebellion of the colonies was because they were considered by Englishmen [to be]
second-class citizens. And they wanted to be first-class. George Washington and the Founding Fathers wanted to be only one class of citizenship.

I believe that Rome lasted 800 years, because what Rome did was allow anyone in the world to become a Roman citizen. Of course Rome only allowed about two percent of the population to become citizens, but now the Founding Fathers made everyone that become a citizen, one class. But the people, including the Civil Rights people, have been trying to make two classes of citizenship in America. Everybody needing the help of Civil Rights anything, automatically second-class citizens. Everybody not needing that, we're first-class citizens. It galls me to death; when I really think about it; I can't sleep at night.

JUAN WILLIAMS: Well, we're at the end of our session together, and I wanted to ask John Doar and Burke Marshall if they had any concluding comments. Gentlemen?

JOHN DOAR: Oh, I think the country has moved a long, long way since 1962. We're not as far as we will be, but on the whole, I'm very optimistic of what has happened, what is happening, and what I think will happen. And so I think that it wasn't easy, I don't know another civilization in the world that's taken on a caste system and broken it, as this country has, and I think we all should take some pride in that.

JUAN WILLIAMS: Burke Marshall?

BURKE MARSHALL: Well, the only thing I'd add is-- This isn't really an addition, but it became clear to me at the time of the events at the University of Mississippi and Mr. Meredith's entry there, that was the second dramatic event in this struggle, the first being the Freedom Rides in 1961, and there were others in between, and others that followed. That I had anything to do with it, it became clear to me that the aim of the Kennedy administration, even if it wasn't put this way, was, and it should have been, to destroy the caste system, as John says, the system of legalized apartheid that lived in the country. It lived there a long time, and to destroy it in a short period of time, even with a new president, was a very difficult undertaking. But on the whole, I think it was accomplished.

Now destroying that legal system is not by any means guaranteeing equality for all people in their daily lives, or in their political lives, or educational lives, but it is a first step. And with the 1964 act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act, that first step, which is a critical step, it seems to me, was accomplished. So that the events at Ole Miss in 1962, October or September, was a critical moment in that, that solidified my own mind, at least, in what we were about. We weren't just about overcoming a crisis; it was another crisis that had to be overcome, but to end up with the destruction of this pernicious system of oppression-- discrimination is too loose, too mild a word for what was going on-- this system of oppression imposed by law, by political life, by custom, by police, by the political systems-- To destroy that, at least, which I think was accomplished, finally.

JUAN WILLIAMS: Let me close by telling a story about Mr. Meredith's graduation in 1963 from the University of Mississippi. Mr. Meredith's name was called, and he went up on the stage in his graduation robes, and he had a button on those robes, and the button was one that had been handed out the year before by people battling to keep him out of the University of Mississippi. And against a white background, in red letters, it read, "Never." Mr. Meredith took the button on graduation day, and turned it upside down. Thank you all very much. [applause]

DEBORAH LEFF: It is impossible to listen to such a marvelous conversation and not have an enormous appetite for learning more. The documents, those incredible letters that James Meredith wrote to the U.S. Department of Justice to get his citizenship, they're all available on our website, with a special curriculum on Ole Miss. It's jfklibrary.org. I also want to tell you about a couple of other things. Burke kept talking about it was followed by the Cuban Missile Crisis. We're, in the entire month of October, going to be dealing with the Cuban Missile Crisis. There's a special exhibit in our Library on the Cuban Missile Crisis in our Museum downstairs. Tomorrow
night, we open a series of forums on the Cuban Missile Crisis. Please join us tomorrow evening when Ted Sorensen and Robert McNamara will be here to talk with us.

One last thing; I encourage you, this is the last night that the United in Memory 9-11 quilt is downstairs, remembering those who died. It's a very moving experience, and I encourage you to go down to the Pavilion. I just want to thank, again, Juan Williams, Burke Marshall, John Doar, and especially James Meredith, for a remarkable evening. [applause]