

Interview with **Dr. Robert Ellis**

May 7, 1986

Interviewer: Judith Vecchione

Production Team: A

Camera Rolls: 220-223

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**Note:** These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in *bold italics* was used in the final version of *Eyes on the Prize*.

00:00:03:00

[camera roll 220]

[sound roll 1158]

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARK IT.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: ROLL 220 MARKER.

INTERVIEWER: NOW THAT FIRST LETTER FROM JAMES MEREDITH THAT CAME TO YOU. HE IDENTIFIED HIMSELF AS, HE IDENTIFIED HIMSELF AS A NEGRO AND HE ASKED FOR ADMISSION. COULD YOU TELL ME JUST A BIT ABOUT YOUR RESPONSE TO THAT PERSONALLY AND OFFICIALLY?

Ellis: Well, the letter that came from James Meredith was something of, I guess, a shock. We realized, I realized that we had an unusual problem. We were required to make copies of any correspondence or forms that were from blacks and these were sent to the office of the Board of Trustees. I conferred with Mr. Hugh Clegg who was then the director of development at the University. Mr. Clegg was a, [coughs] a former official with the FBI, and he served as a resource in dealing with this particular kind of problem.

00:01:26:00

INTERVIEWER: COULD YOU TELL ME WHAT IT WAS THAT, THAT JUST TO FINISH THE HISTORY THEN, WHAT YOUR RESPONSE WAS TO MR. MEREDITH. [pause] ON, ON ADVICE OF COURSE.

Ellis: I'm not—I don't recall the precise words of the response to Mere—to Mr. Meredith. Essentially, it brought about some delay. We collected as I recall it the entire application for admission and then denied the application. It was denied on the basis of an attempt to transfer from an institution that was not at that time accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools.

00:02:27:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. NOW, YOU SAID TO ME—YOU WERE JUST—AS WE WERE JUST TALKING THAT THIS WAS LEGAL ADVICE THAT YOU HAD FROM MR. CLEGG. DID THIS MEAN THAT THERE WAS—ACTUALLY WAS A POLICY OF NOT ADMITTING BLACKS AT THE UNIVERSITY AT THAT TIME?

Ellis: I'm not certain that the University had a policy that did not admit blacks. I think the, the, the policy really was at the state level. We were directed to deliver applications, correspondence, copies of them to the board office and in, in, in effect the, the decisions were made above the, the institution's level.

INTERVIEWER: DO YOU WANT TO STOP FOR A MOMENT? WE'LL JUST CHECK TECHNICALLY.

[cut]

00:03:31:00

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARKER PLEASE.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: MARKER.

INTERVIEWER: YOU WERE SAYING ABOUT, ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY, HOW THE UNIVERSITY DID NOT HAVE A POLICY—

Ellis: Yes, the University of Mississippi had no adopted policy on admission according to race. Our direction on racial matters came to us from the board and I presume from the board to the state at large.

00:04:08:00

INTERVIEWER: DO YOU THINK THAT THIS—THAT THE, THE BOARD'S POLICY WAS IN ANY WAY A REACTION TO SOME OF THE OTHER CASES THAT HAD GONE BEFORE, THE AUTHORINE LUCY CASE FOR EXAMPLE?

Ellis: Well, there were other cases that were confronted by the Board of Trustees before Meredith's case. We were involved in two or three situations in which the board was able to come to a, a satisfactory conclusion without litigation. I recall, at the time, that the Board of Trustees had a, a scholarship program which enabled blacks who might otherwise qualify for admission to the University of Mississippi to enroll at other institutions in other parts of the country and the board would provide funding which would enable those blacks to, to attend those institutions. And the board had used this policy, this scholarship to enable blacks to go to school elsewhere.

00:05:33:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW JAMES MEREDITH AND THE NAACP OF COURSE SUED THE UNIVERSITY AND THERE WAS A VERY LONG COURT PROCEEDING. EVENTUALLY JUDGE MISE RULED THAT MEREDITH HAD LEGALLY BEEN DENIED ADMITTANCE; THAT IT WAS A, A LEGAL SITUATION. IS THAT WHAT YOU EXPECTED?

Ellis: I thought, at the time, that the University of Mississippi had a valid case in the case of James Meredith. Meredith had moved from the state, he had roots in the state certainly. Technically he was a non-resident, although we never argued that point in the litigation, but he did come to us with a record that was not acceptable. If it had been a white person who had applied with that record that person would have not been accepted. And so I, I thought, at the time, yes, that we did have a valid reason for denying admission. And I really thought that the original court decision was the proper decision. Now, I'm sure I was biased in my attitude, but nevertheless that was it.

00:07:21:00

INTERVIEWER: DO YOU THINK THAT WHEN YOU WERE SAYING HE WAS NOT A QUALIFIED APPLICANT WERE YOU TALKING ACADEMICALLY OR WERE YOU TALKING—THERE WERE OTHER POINTS BROUGHT UP ABOUT HIS RECORD AND HIS PAST CONDUCT. DID YOU, DID YOU COUNT THOSE AS PART OF THE APPLICATION ALSO?

Ellis: No, the decision was based, as I recall it, in terms of the, the academic record. Not meeting the requirements of the institution.

00:07:33:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW WHY WAS IT, DO YOU THINK, YOU'RE SAYING THAT IT WAS A STATE LEVEL POLICY THAT WE'RE INVOLVED IN AND I, I'M ASKING YOU PERHAPS FOR A LITTLE SPECULATION, BUT YOU WERE A RESIDENT?

WHY WAS IT THAT THE STATE WAS SO OPPOSED TO ALLOWING JAMES MEREDITH INTO OLE MISS AT THIS TIME? PEOPLE WERE VERY EMOTIONAL ABOUT IT AND WE NEED TO HAVE A SENSE TWENTY YEARS LATER OF WHAT THAT WAS.

Ellis: Well, I grew up as a southerner [coughs] and the, the, the attitudes of, of at least the white population in the South was, I think, fairly uniform. We believed in social and even political segregation of the races. Those of us who were native southerners grew up in that kind of environment and we never really came to a confrontation with anything being wrong with that kind of, of attitude. It was just that was the way life was lived in the South at that time.

00:08:57:00

INTERVIEWER: SO IT WASN'T JAMES MEREDITH SO MUCH AS A, A CHANGE THAT, THAT WAS THE PROBLEM?

Ellis: Yes, I, I think the people in the South were confronted with a [coughs] a radical change which was brought to a climax by these few individuals that [coughs] attempted to break down the, the, the mores or the customs of, of people in the South, the white people in the South at least. I think it's very probable that even the representatives from the NAACP would probably admit that James Meredith was not the perfect candidate for breaking the admission policy, if it was a policy, but he was the best they could get at that time. It took a lot of courage for anybody to, to buck the system.

INTERVIEWER: STOP AND LET ME KNOW. I THINK WE MUST BE ALMOST OUT—

[cut]

00:10:06:00

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: MARKER.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: GOTTA LOOK BETWEEN.

Ellis: My—my knowledge of James Meredith is really based on observation in, in the courtroom when he was a witness. The correspondence that we've had and the reading of accounts where he was interviewed in the newspaper and materials that were gathered by our attorneys about his military record.

00:10:50:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

Ellis: From the information that I've got and the observations that I made, I think—

INTERVIEWER: WAIT, WAIT. WE'RE—STOP. WE'RE NOT GONNA MAKE IT HERE.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: NO.

00:11:01:00

[cut]

[slate]

[change to camera roll 221]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: ROLL 221, MARKER.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: STANDBY FOR JUST A MOMENT.

INTERVIEWER: LET HIM GET OUT THE DOOR AND CLOSE IT ON US.

Ellis: Now, you want me to talk about James Meredith?

INTERVIEWER: HMMM-HMMM.

Ellis: Well, based on my observations from the various sources I, I saw James Meredith as a, a relatively young black man. He was always neatly dressed in the courtrooms when I saw him. From the documents that we received from say, the Air Force, I got the picture of a young black man who had conflict with the racial problem. And yet, when I saw him in the courtroom situation where the state's attorneys were q—questioning him, I find that I had to sympathize with him a little bit because I felt like he was being almost persecuted. I, I thought the, the state's attorneys were really abusive, particularly, in the proceedings at Meridian when they were fishing for information or evidence. I never had any conversations with Meredith directly. And that's really, I think, about all I can say about my relationships and my observations concerning him.

00:12:49:00

INTERVIEWER: THE ONLY OTHER THING I COULD THINK OF TO ASK YOU IS JUDGE WISDOM CALLED HIM, IN HIS DECISION, IT WAS A VERY MEMORABLE

PHRASE, HE CALLED MEREDITH, "A MAN WITH A MISSION." I, I WONDERED IF, DID HE SEEM DETERMINED TO YOU IN THAT WAY?

Ellis: Yes, I, I, I think so. I, I think Meredith had a, a compelling need to do something about the racial controversy. I, I think this showed up in the reports from his service in the Air Force. And I think it showed up in the courtroom. And I, I think it showed up in subsequent acts that he was involved in, the, the famous march down Highway 51 later, to me, just demonstrates this, this compelling need and I, I think it's more than just a matter of the publicity that he garnered from it. I, I really think the man had an honest, compulsive need to do something about something that he saw as wrong.

00:14:12:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW, YOU TOLD US A STORY, WE'RE JUMPING A LITTLE AHEAD, ABOUT GOVERNOR BARNETT TELEPHONING YOU AFTER THE COURT OF APPEALS HAS REVERSED JUDGE MISE'S DECISION. COULD YOU TELL US ABOUT THAT AGAIN, WHAT THE GOVERNOR SAID TO YOU?

Ellis: Governor Barnett telephoned me at my home one evening and it was prior to my being served, processed to attend court. And the, the gist of his conversation to me was to stand firm; that I would have the backing of the Governor if I would just uphold the Southern way of life. And I recall the Governor did say that we'd fought and died for our way of life and I suppose I was a little over emotional myself at the time. I was in the middle of the thing and I was wrong in some sense if I went one way and I was wrong in another sense if I went the other way. I felt very insecure and I, I do recall I suggested the Governor that I'd already dodged a lot more bullets than he had in defense of the country. I, I really was irritated at the fact that he would put that kind of pressure on me and call me at my home.

00:15:50:00

INTERVIEWER: DID, DID YOU THINK THAT HE ACTUALLY HAD A PLAN FOR HOW YOU WERE GONNA STAND FAST OR DO YOU THINK HE WAS JUST TALKING?

Ellis: Well, of course I'm speculating in response to that kind of question. I personally think that Governor Barnett knew what he wanted to do: he wanted to keep Meredith out. But I think he listened to the last person who spoke to him in terms of the ways to do it. I really don't think he did a lot of original thinking on his own.

00:16:26:00

INTERVIEWER: BUT DID THE UNIVERSITY WANT THE GOVERNORS ASSISTANCE? DID IT EVER ASK FOR HIM TO COME INTO THE CASE?

Ellis: I think the University, if it could have divorced itself from the state political leaders, would have admitted Meredith in the first place.

00:16:47:00

INTERVIEWER: ONE OF THE QUESTIONS THAT'S COME UP IN FACT ABOUT THE GOVERNOR'S POSITION IS THAT THE UNIVERSITY MAY HAVE ACTED THE WAY IT DID, SOME PEOPLE SAY, SO THE GOVERNOR WOULDN'T CLOSE THE SCHOOL. WAS THERE A FEAR THAT HE MIGHT DO THAT IF YOU DIDN'T STAND FAST?

Ellis: Well, there certainly was the threat that Governor Barnett would close the University. [pause] It's difficult to say whether he would actually have done it. I think perhaps if it had come to that and he had closed the University that he probably would have created so much opposition from the people in the state, certainly the alumni in the state, that he wouldn't have gotten away with it. We went through this same kind of thing back in the '30s under Governor Bilbo, when Bilbo was so involved in the firing of faculty members and the reorganizing of the institutional leadership, that we lost our accreditation. And the alumni came then to the front in helping the institution to get reorganized and get, gain re-accreditation. And we even developed the constitutional Board of Trustees out of that experience. So I, I really can't see that the governor would have accomplished anything by closing the University. But it was difficult for me to see any consistent rational on the part of the governor at that time.

00:18:34:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW, FINALLY IN COURT IN THE—IN FRONT OF THE FIFTH CIRCUIT. THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES, SAYS YES WE WILL ADMIT JAMES MEREDITH. THEY, THEY MAKE THIS—THEY DECIDE AND ADMIT THIS IN OPEN COURT. COULD YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT TURNED THAT AROUND? WHAT WAS, WHAT WAS THE PRESSURE THAT TURNED THAT AROUND?

Ellis: Maybe I'm oversimplifying it, but I recall when all of the principles of the case, including every one of the members of the Board of Trustees were summoned to attend court in New Orleans before the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. This was the first time that the individual board members were confronted with a decision and particularly a decision that threatened them with perhaps fines and even perhaps sentencing to jail. So it, it was quite simple when each one of 'em was asked to stand and answer directly to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals sitting in back, all of them there, and either saying, yes I will approve the admission, or, no I won't approve the admission of James Meredith. And if they answered in the negative they had their own security threatened. That brought a quick closure to the, to the issue.

INTERVIEWER: CAN YOU STOP FOR A MOMENT?

00:20:15:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

INTERVIEWER: I THINK THIS IS A STORY WE SHOULD PUT ON.

00:20:18:00

[cut]

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: MARKER.

Ellis: Well, as the University's registrar it was my responsibility to register all students. I was called to Jackson in the Board of Trustees' office, then in the Wolfolk building, for the purpose of registering James Meredith. On that occasion I never saw him. I subsequently learned that he was intercepted and turned away by the governor of the state. There was the later occasion on the campus of the University in which we were located in the extension building over on one end of the campus. On that occasion the registrar—the governor read a document where he assumed the responsibilities and the role of the registrar and then read a, a notation or a document to James Meredith denying him admission to the University.

00:21:31:00

INTERVIEWER: WERE YOU THERE AT THAT POINT WHEN HE DID THAT?

Ellis: Yes, I was.

INTERVIEWER: HOW DID YOU FEEL HEARING HIM TAKING YOUR JOB?

Ellis: Some of my friends through the years have always threatened to get the state auditor to take that day's pay away from me. I don't know how I felt, you know, we were all under an awful lot of stress.

00:21:52:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

Ellis: We were acamedicians [sic] and we were being tossed into the pot with a bunch of politicians. And they meant business.

INTERVIEWER: CAN YOU STOP PLEASE.



00:22:03:00

[cut]

[slate]

[change to camera roll 222]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: ROLL 222, MARKER. OK.

Ellis: I think the, the University's administration we were very much like a shuttlecock in a, in a badminton game between the political forces of the national and the state government. We were a bunch of acamedicians [sic] in a, in territory, environment that we just didn't know how to cope.

00:22:36:00

INTERVIEWER: LET'S GET OUT OF THE COURTROOM AND, AND, AND THE, THE POLITICS AND COME BACK TO THE CAMPUS HERE. AND SEPTEMBER COMES ALONG AND IT'S BECOME—GOES ON AND BECOMES CLEAR THAT JAMES MEREDITH IS GOING TO BE ENROLLED. COULD YOU TALK A LITTLE ABOUT WHAT THE MOOD WAS ON THE CAMPUS, WAS IT TENSE, WERE THERE INCIDENTS WHERE THE STUDENTS WERE TENSE?

Ellis: Yes, it was quite tense on the campus as we began that fall session because we knew that sooner or later as the time for registration approached that this thing, this, this situation was going to reach a, a climax. There was some drop in enrollment, it later proved, because parents were apprehensive about sending children to the campus and, I guess, I was fatalist enough from my Air Force experience to just believe that this thi—this integration of the University would not have taken place without some bloodshed.

00:23:51:00

INTERVIEWER: YOU REALLY THOUGHT THERE WOULD BE VIOLENCE?

Ellis: I really did. I— [coughs] after school first opened, we had a football game in Jackson, I think we were playing Tulane University, and at half time the Governor made a speech before the assembled people at the football game, in which he urged people to support the position of the state, and it was so emotional and so charged that when we read about it in the paper we, we just knew, those of us on, in the administration, we just knew that, that we were in for some, some real problems.

00:24:43:00

INTERVIEWER: THERE WERE A LOT OF OUTSIDERS COMING IN ALSO. WAS THAT, WAS THAT SOMETHING THAT WAS WORRYING YOU? THERE WERE PEOPLE FROM OUTSIDE OF THE UNIVERSITY AND OUTSIDE OF THE AREA COMING INTO OXFORD.

Ellis: Some years, I, I guess, it was a year later after the riot at Oxford, we had the Dean of Student Affairs at Mississippi State and the student body leaders come to Oxford to make plans for the football game that we played against State in Oxford that year. The purpose of the meeting was to hold down the activities of students that destroyed and so on. And I can recall that the Dean of Students made the statement, yes indeed, said the people in Starkville and Columbus were encouraging students from State to come up to Ole Miss and help keep Meredith out of Ole Miss. *I recall driving to the campus* on Monday morning, the riot had, had occurred on the previous Sunday, and I saw bands of teenagers flying confederate flags and marching along the perimeter of the campus like they were going to war. It, it, it was just completely unreal and I recall that after the riot, it seems to me, there were something like a hundred and fifty people who were physically captured by the marshals and the military and dumped into the basement under the registrar's office. Prisoners who had been captured. And of, of all these people who were captured a relatively few of them were students at Ole Miss or even local residents of Oxford. They were from all over.

00:26:47:00

INTERVIEWER: DID—DO YOU THINK THAT THE, THE UNIVERSITY SHOULD HAVE DONE SOMETHING ELSE, SHOULD HAVE ASKED THE GOVERNOR FOR THE NATIONAL GUARD OR SOMETHING. DID—WERE, WERE YOU CONSIDERING THOSE KINDS OF RADICAL OPTIONS?

Ellis: I was not privy to what the top administration was doing in order to accommodate the, the registration of James Meredith. I've told my classes in one of my classes through the years that if it had been a military decision on the part of the army to come in and, and take the campus that the commander responsible would have, would have arrived with his troops as soon as the sun was up on a morning and he would have had the campus nailed down before dusk. But the fact is that the troops came in from Tennessee right at dusk and incidentally the University's administration was not informed at all. They were like anybody else who happened to be on the campus that Sunday evening. They saw the troops when they came rolling onto the campus. So, very clearly the University's administration was not involved in maintaining or controlling or doing anything else in terms of keeping the order on the campus. It was a political situation.

00:28:28:00

INTERVIEWER: YOU SAID TO US THAT YOU WERE HOME THAT EVENING OF THE RIOT, YOU STAYED HOME. DID YOU LISTEN TO THE PRESIDENT'S SPEECH ON TV?

Ellis: Did I listen? I can't honestly say whether I did or did not hear this—the president's speech. I probably did, but I, I must confess I, I was so chagrined at the political manipulation on both sides, the federal and the state governments, that what they had to say was rather meaningless to me. I had lost—I, I, I really had lost faith in, in both the President and the Governor.

INTERVIEWER: STOP FOR A MOMENT.

[cut]

00:29:23:00

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARK IT.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: MARKER.

Ellis: Well, I received a telephone call on Sunday by my superior telling me that I would report to the campus on Monday morning for the purpose of registering James Meredith. I had been contacted about the possibility of registering him on Sunday which I didn't agree to do because normally the offices are not open on Sunday. But I drove out to the campus on Monday morning after the riot and I enter—entered the North entrance coming up sorority row. At the entrance to the campus, my automobile was stopped and I had, had to open the trunk and it was searched and then the army permitted me to continue on the campus after I had identified them as a member of the University staff. I drove on up, *and, I guess, when I got to the circle was when I really saw the impact of the, of the riot the previous evening.* There were burned out cars. There was, I recall a, a, a big tractor on the—in the center of the circle. There were tear gas canisters strewed over the streets in the campus. There were bullet holes in the columns and the doorways of the administration building, the Lyceum—

[sound roll out]

[cut]

00:31:13:00

[slate]

[change to camera roll 223]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: ROLL 223, MARK.

INTERVIEWER: SO WE WERE JUST, YOU WERE JUST GONNA DRIVE US TO THE CIRCLE AND YOU WERE TELLING ME ABOUT THE KINDS OF THINGS YOU WERE SEEING—

Ellis: Yeah, one of the most touching scenes I recall seeing was the Chairman of our Department of Health, Physical Education and Recreation was out on the street behind the administration building collecting the tennis court nets. They had been taken from the courts oh, two or three blocks away and strewed in back of the administration building. Why, you know, one can't know, but it was the streets were just filled with wrecks, burned out wrecks and, and debris. It was very obvious that there had been a riot. And it must have been two or three days later before the smell of tear gas finally disappeared from the campus. ***I reported to my office. As I recall it, there weren't very many of the staff there. Many of them were too afraid to come to the campus on Monday. And, later,*** the representatives from the Justice department and the Chief Marshall, I think it was Mr. Doar and Mr. McShane accompanied ***James Meredith, and came to my private office and I accommodated the registration there.*** I recall also that there was a *Time* reporter who barged into the office very quickly and took a, a picture of the, of the scene at the time. And I recall seeing that picture in *Time Magazine* later and I had the appearance of one who was a bit angry about the whole situation. I'm not sure it was anger as much as it was the fantastically tense environment that I was reacting to.

00:33:31:00

INTERVIEWER: IT WAS—AND YET IT WAS ALMOST A VERY QUIET ENDING TO THIS LONG THING.

Ellis: Once the army took control, then the situation was settled. There were sporadic outbursts. Students and perhaps others, I'm not sure, shooting firecrackers at night congregating on the campus at night. The, the University staff, the, the student personnel staff, those of us who were department heads, we came out every night for a month and walked around the campus trying to disperse crowds of students. Trying to, by our presence, assist the military in, in maintaining some order. And yet there were incidents of firecrackers, fireworks and, and this sort of thing for I'd say the entire first semester. And of course the, the reactions from it, there were many students who transferred to other institutions. There was a decided drop in the enrollment as a, as a consequence.

00:34:59:00

INTERVIEWER: WELL, THAT'S ONE LOSS THAT CAME FROM JAMES MEREDITH'S ENROLLMENT. WERE THERE OTHER LOSSES OR WERE THERE THINGS THAT WERE WON WHEN HE WAS EN—ENROLLED?

Ellis: I tend to be fatalistic about things like this. I, I think, again, that there had to be a confrontation on this issue. And I really believe that the, the few deaths that we did have as the direct result of the, of the riot were inevitable. I, I really believe that it would be, it would have been impossible to have made the change that we made without some bloodshed. Now I have to look at it from the perspective of today. And I would say that from a racial point of view, from an economic point of view, and even perhaps from a social point of view, it did mark the beginning of an improved relationship between the races and this state. I think

today we've probably made more progress in racial harmony than perhaps other parts of the country. But that, of course, is an opinion. So I, I think that's one gain that was made from this thing. I think there were some severe losses. I think the University of Mississippi got a very bad press out of this situation, [coughs] and I think it was a, a bad press that wasn't justified because from my perspective it was essentially a conflict. A political conflict in which the political leaders really took over and made the decisions that counted. I recall the Chancellor, Chancellor Williams—we were called to a meeting in, in Jackson in which the Gov—Governor's representatives applied some pressure and some council to us before we attended a, a court hearing. And I remember the Chancellor finally telling the Governor there was a point beyond which he simply couldn't go any further. If the federal court made a decision to register Meredith then he would have to comply with that court decision. I can assure you as a, as a relatively minor official to hear the Chancellor of the University tell the governor of the state that there was a point where we had to obey, was most reassuring to me at this point.

00:38:00:00

INTERVIEWER: WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY DO YOU THINK THAT RIOT WAS? WAS IT THE GOVERNOR'S? WAS IT THE STUDENTS? WAS IT THE PRESIDENT'S? WAS IT THE, THE SOCIAL SYSTEMS? WHOSE FAULT WAS IT?

Ellis: I think it was the, the Governor of the state and the President of the United States. They were so busy protecting the interests of the Democratic Party that they were willing to sit there and negotiate with each other while the forces were building up to the point where a riot was inevitable. If the, *if the Federal Government had told Governor Barnett we're coming in, and we're going to maintain order, and we're going to register Meredith, they would have had my complete respect and cooperation. They didn't do that. And by the same token, the Governor was so obsessed with the idea of maintaining our way of life that that was the ultimate objective. And with those two points of view, and with the two political leaders trying to make each other look as good as they could, the situation just got out of hand.*

00:39:16:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW, ONE MORE THING ABOUT THE RIOT, WHEN YOU WERE DESCRIBING IT, I WANTED TO ASK YOU WHAT DID IT FEEL LIKE TO YOU, WHAT WERE YOUR EMOTIONS AS YOU LOOKED AT YOUR UNIVERSITY WITH BULLET HOLES IN IT? [pause] SADNESS?

Ellis: Well, yes, there was sadness. There was alarm. There was disgust. I, I mentioned to you earlier that the Governor made the telephone call to me. On the other side of that coin I got a, a lengthy telegram, it must have been twelve, fifteen inches in length from the federal Attorney General, Robert Kennedy, telling me to do my duty, which, you know, in the light of what I knew was going on between the Governor and President, was ridiculous, because I, I felt then and I feel today that they weren't doing their duty. If they had acted as the law

enforcement officer, if the Attorney General had as, as I perceive his responsibility, I think the riot could have been avoided.

INTERVIEWER: LET'S STOP FOR A MOMENT.

[cut]

00:40:40:00

[slate]

[change to camera roll 223]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARK IT.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: MARKER.

Ellis: The University's administration was, was notably—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: WOULD YOU START AGAIN?

INTERVIEWER: SORRY. GO AHEAD.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: JUST GO AHEAD.

Ellis: The University's administration was, was notably not informed about the circumstances of what was going to happen when the plans were being made to bring Mr. Meredith to the University's campus. I, I know for a fact that the University's administration did not know when the military was going to come to the campus on that Sunday evening. And didn't know until the troops actually began arriving on the campus. And of course the riot had already begun by that time.

INTERVIEWER: I THINK THAT'S IT. I THINK THAT WE HAVE GOT WONDERFUL—

00:41:38:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

INTERVIEWER: —WONDERFUL MATERIAL HERE.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:41:41:00

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