



Interview with **John McLaurin**

May 7, 1985

Brandon, Mississippi

Interviewer: Judith Vecchione

Production Team: A

Camera Rolls: 217-219

Sound Rolls: 1157

Interview gathered as part of *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*. Produced by Blackside, Inc. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

Preferred Citation

Interview with John McLaurin, conducted by Blackside, Inc. on May 7, 1985, for *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*. Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

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*.

00:00:02:00

[camera roll 217]

[sound roll 1157]

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARK IT, PLEASE.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: MARKER.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: YOU WANT A NUMBER?

INTERVIEWER: NO, I DON'T CARE. NOW WHY DO YOU THINK OLE MISS WAS SUCH A SYMBOL TO PEOPLE IN MISSISSIPPI, PROBABLY STILL IS?

McLaurin: Well, Ole Miss is loved by everybody that went to school there. And there are a lot of football fans that never did go to school there that really love Ole Miss. Now there are some people in the state that love other schools, but the real thing that, that caused all of the loyalty, at, at the time that this event occurred, was that it was breaking down a system which had existed for three hundred years in this state and the people just were not ready for it at the time.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: CAN WE STOP FOR A MOMENT?

INTERVIEWER: OK. SURE.

[cut]

00:00:54:00

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: MARK.

INTERVIEWER: NOW HOW STRONG WAS THE FEELING AGAINST INTEGRATION AT OLE MISS AT THIS TIME? I MEAN, IF YOU'D HAD A VOTE IN THE LEGISLATURE ON SOME SORT OF LAW, SOME SEGREGATION LAW, WHAT WOULD THAT VOTE HAVE BEEN?

McLaurin: It would have been—

INTERVIEWER: ONE SECOND. CAN I ASK YOU TO PUT MY SUBJECT IN?

McLaurin: The vote [coughs] in the legislature would have been roughly forty-nine to nothing in the Senate and a hundred thirty-three to two in the House of Representatives.

INTERVIEWER: I'M GONNA ASK YOU TO KIND OF GIVE ME A LITTLE BIT MORE OF A FEELING—

McLaurin: Now, the, the feeling was very high among practically every Mississippian. That night if Governor Barnett had gotten on the radio and asked for people to come to Oxford to defend the state of Mississippi I feel like it—the, the roads wouldn't have carried all the people that would've come in there from Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, Tennessee, and Louisiana.

00:02:01:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW, AT WHAT POINT WOULD YOU SAY DID THE GOVERNOR AND YOU AND OTHER PEOPLE REALIZE THAT THE UNIVERSITY AND THE COURTS WERE NOT GOING TO STOP THIS Q—THIS ENROLLMENT. THAT THE GOVERNOR WAS GOING TO HAVE TO TAKE SOME ACTION HIMSELF?

McLaurin: Well, [coughs] he had told us all the way through that it was not going to happen and, and he led the people of Mississippi and we believed in him. And we didn't believe it, it would actually happen. And Kennedy brought the troops in, then, and, of course, defeated, defeated us with the troops. It was just like war up there when we flew in the evening of the event. The Army had taken over the Oxford airport and they had to check us out before they'd let us out of the airplane. It was just like war times.

00:02:57:00

INTERVIEWER: DID, DID YOU THINK THAT THE COURTS WERE—AT, AT, AT THE BEGINNING, DID YOU THINK THE COURTS WERE GONNA BACK YOU UP AND, AND HOLD THE LINE FOR YOU?

McLaurin: Well, [coughs] I, truthfully, I, I really didn't. I didn't know how far they would go though. But I didn't think that they would refuse—

INTERVIEWER: YOU HAVE TO SAY WHO “THEY” ARE.

McLaurin: I, I didn't think that the Courts would refuse to admit James Meredith. As far as they, they could decree it.

00:03:29:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW, AT THIS POINT, DID GOVERNOR BARNETT CONSIDER JUST CLOSING DOWN THE UNIVERSITY RATHER THAN, THAN LET, LET THE EVENTS GO THROUGH OR DID HE THINK ABOUT OTHER STRATEGIES LIKE CALLING OUT THE NATIONAL GUARD HIMSELF?

McLaurin: I never heard it discussed that Governor Bar—Barnett was considering closing down Ole Miss. Now I'm sure it was considered to use the National Guard and a lot of other things were talked about, but I don't believe that it was ever in his mind to close the school.

INTERVIEWER: BUT THEY'D DONE THAT IN SOME OTHER PLACES, HADN'T THEY? I MEAN WHY WOULDN'T YOU CLOSE IT DOWN?

McLaurin: It's just too big an operation and too fine an institution to close down.

00:04:19:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW THAT DAY IN JACKSON WHEN GOVERNOR BARNETT PERSONALLY STOPPED JAMES MEREDITH FROM ENROLLING, READ IT ACROSS THE NATION. COULD YOU TELL US ABOUT THAT AND WHERE YOU WERE?

McLaurin: Yes. All right. [coughs] A few days before the big event occurred on Sunday, Governor Barnett set himself up as registrar of the University in the Wolfolk state office building and he relieved the registrar, Mr. Ellis, and my job was to have Mr. Ellis upstairs and entertain him and have him away from where Chief Marshal McShane and James Meredith were gonna enter and Governor Barnett would confront 'em as registrar. So Representative Russell Fox and I were a few floors above and we had Mr. Ellis, regular re—registrar for Ole Miss, there and we just talked to him for about an hour to keep his attention up there and not down where he could register James Meredith. Now, [coughs] when James Meredith and Marshall McShane appeared Governor Barnett said, now which one of you

gentlemen is Mr. Meredith? And that story has been told many times since.

INTERVIEWER: THERE WERE PEOPLE ALL OVER THE PLACE AT THAT TIME. CROWDS ALL AROUND.

McLaurin: Crowds were around, yes. Crowds were gathering and people were talking about it. That's all that was talked about in Mississippi at the time. People were upset.

INTERVIEWER: DO YOU THINK THEY WERE THERE TO TRY TO PROTECT THE GOVERNOR OUT OF SOME LOYALTY TO THE GOVERNOR?

McLaurin: Yes. I think, I think that was part of it. I know in the afternoon on Sunday when this big event occurred people gathered around the mansion to help guard it. They sure did.

00:06:18:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

INTERVIEWER: NOW DO YOU THINK GOVERNOR—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: WE'RE RUNNING OUT.

INTERVIEWER: OOPS I'M SORRY. LET'S STOP AND CHANGE.

00:06:23:00

[cut]

[slate]

[change to camera roll 218]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: SECOND MARKER.

INTERVIEWER: NOW DO YOU THINK THERE WAS A POLITIC—THIS WAS A POLITICAL ACTION OR DO YOU THINK GOVERNOR BARNETT HAD HIS OWN REAL CONVICTIONS? HIS OWN PLAN FOR HOW TO ACT?

McLaurin: I think, [coughs] I think Governor Barnett was sincere and I think he was leading the people in a manner he thought they should be led. I think there was a lot of discussion on Sunday back and forth between Washington and the, and, and the Governor's Mansion. However, I don't believe that any plan was ever cut. I don't think he could ever agree on anything.

00:07:10:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW JUST BEFORE WE GET UP TO THAT ACTUAL DAY, I JUST—
COUPLE OF QUESTIONS.

McLaurin: All right.

INTERVIEWER: IN THE, IN THE TWO WEEKS BEFORE THE END OF SEPTEMBER,
THIS EVENT, THERE ARE A LOT OF PEOPLE COMING INTO OXFORD. THERE'S A
LOT OF TENSION THERE. THE NEWS MEDIA WAS REPORTING IT. WHY DIDN'T
THE GOVERNOR ASK, AT THAT POINT, WHY DIDN'T HE SAY, SAY WE'VE GOT
TO CLEAR THIS AREA?

McLaurin: I, I don't know why he didn't, but he probably didn't see—the Governor probably
didn't see fit to clear the people out of Oxford for two weeks before this occurred,
particularly news people, that were coming in there. He just didn't see it was necessary, I'm
sure.

INTERVIEWER: DO YOU THINK HE THOUGHT IT WOULD HELP TO STOP THE
ENROLLMENT IF—WAS THERE SOME SORT OF—DO YOU THINK IT, IT MIGHT
HAVE BEEN, YOU KNOW, IF PEOPLE FEEL THIS STRONGLY IT'LL HELP SHOW
THAT WE DON'T WANT THIS?

McLaurin: I think that's probably true. I think it's true that, that he and other leaders thought
that the harder the people showed their disgust for what was going on, I think, he thought it
might help to stay the matter off.

00:08:23:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW YOU WERE AT THAT FOOTBALL GAME AGAINST
KENTUCKY, THE, THE SATURDAY BEFORE, COULD YOU TELL US ABOUT
WHAT THE GOVERNOR SAID AND HOW PEOPLE—YOU KNOW, GIVE US A
LITTLE—

McLaurin: Well, of course it's been twenty-six years ago since the football game the night
before this occurred, but at the half-time in Memorial Stadium in Jackson, Governor Barnett
made a talk and he just assured the people that he was standing pat and the people were with
him. They applauded him, they stood. They applauded him and he had the crowd in the palm
of his hand.

INTERVIEWER: AND, AND THEY HAD A SONG THEY WERE SINGING, CAN YOU
TELL US ABOUT THAT? REMEMBER THAT?

McLaurin: "Go Mississippi" was the state song and that song was, was sung quite often
during that period of time.

INTERVIEWER: DID IT TAKE ON A SPECIAL MEANING THIS—THAT NIGHT?
THAT WE'RE GOING TO STAND TOGETHER?

McLaurin: Oh, ev—everybody was in agreement to stand together. I mean we were all united and he just got an ovation there at that ball game that he never had received before to my knowledge.

00:09:35:00

INTERVIEWER: WAS HE A GOOD SPEAKER GENERALLY?

McLaurin: Yes, he was a forceful speaker, Governor, Governor Barnett was a good speaker. He was of course a trial lawyer and a great one and he had a lot of experience speaking. He was elected Governor on his third outing for the job and so he had made world of speeches and he was a good speaker.

INTERVIEWER: DO YOU THINK THAT HE APPEALED TO PEOPLE'S EMOTIONS OR TO THEIR MINDS OR TO EVERYTHING? WHAT—HOW—WHAT WAS IT THAT MADE HIM GOOD?

McLaurin: Well [coughs] you might say it fed their emotions. They didn't have to be emotionalized so to speak. At that time the people were very emotional and it, of course, the speech fed their emotions.

00:10:26:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW ON SEPTEMBER 30TH THE GOVERNOR SENT YOU AND A FEW OTHERS RIGHT UP TO MISS—TO OXFORD TO BE HIS REPRESENTATIVE. WHAT WERE YOU SUPPOSED TO DO THERE? WERE YOU SUPPOSED TO NEGOTIATE OR BLOCK MR. MEREDITH?

McLaurin: We—on Sunday afternoon Governor Barnett asked Senator George Yarbrough, who was president pro-temp of the Senate, Judge Russell Moore, circuit judge there in Jackson, and Representative Buddy Newman, who is now speaker of the Mississippi House of Representatives, and me to go to Oxford and to represent him up there. He would be at the mansion in Jackson. And we were to look at the situation and keep him posted on what was going on and when we arrived, course the Army had taken over the Oxford airport, dark had fallen, we had to be inspected in the plane before we got out. The plane was flown by Rex Armstead of Lula, Mississippi. We went into the campus and there we were confronted by Nicholas Katzenbach, then the Attorney General of the United States. We went into a room with him and Senator Yarbrough did most of the speaking for our crowd. And he and, and Katzenbach had conversation there for about thirty minutes. We then went out to the front porch of the Lyceum building and, and the Federal Marshals were, were lined up all across the lawn porch there of the Lyceum building and students were across the little way there from 'em very close to 'em. And one of the marshals fired a tear gas canister into the crowd and then is when all of the trouble began.

00:12:34:00

INTERVIEWER: YOU WERE SITTING—YOU WERE STANDING UP THERE ON THE PORCH LOOKING DOWN AS IT JUST STARTED?

McLaurin: I was standing right behind the U.S. Marshals.

INTERVIEWER: NOW WHAT WAS THE FEELING, AS YOU'RE STANDING THERE AND THIS IS ABOUT TO HAPPEN, WHAT, WHAT IS THE ATMOSPHERE LIKE? DID IT LOOK REALLY DANGEROUS? DID IT LOOK—

McLaurin: Yes, it, it looked dangerous as we stood there behind the Federal Marshals, certainly, I'd have to tell you that it did.

INTERVIEWER: WHAT DID YOU THINK WAS GONNA HAPPEN?

McLaurin: Well, [coughs] I really didn't expect to happen what did happen. But when that tear gas canister was fired then the students rebelled against it and we then went over to the alumni house and called the Governor's office and told him what was happening. And he asked us to come on back to Jackson and we did. We flew on back down there.

00:13:33:00

INTERVIEWER: YOU THINK HE DIDN'T WANT TO HAVE ANY ASSOCIATION WITH THAT AT ALL?

McLaurin: Well, I don't think that, [coughs] I don't think that would be accurate that he didn't want to have any association with it at all, but we were asked to come back to Jackson and we did. And [coughs] we—in the plane going back we got accounts on the radio and, of course, when we got to Jackson, we listened to the radio accounts and, and they fought up there pretty much all night.

00:14:04:00

INTERVIEWER: LET ME GO BACK JUST BEFORE WE TALKED ABOUT THAT IN THAT MEETING WITH AT—ATTORNEY GENERAL KATZENBACH, WHAT WAS IT THAT, THAT THEY WERE DISCUSSING FOR THIRTY MINUTES?

McLaurin: One, the primary thing, was that the highway patrol was there and Senator Yarbrough was going to order them to leave the post and Katzenbach seemed to be excited about that. He didn't want the highway patrol relieved of, of their duties there and Senator Yarbrough stood up to him and did relieve 'em since the Army had taken over and the U.S. Marshals, Senator Yarbrough didn't figure that the highway patrol ought to be there to help 'em.

INTERVIEWER: COULDN'T DO MUCH OF ANYTHING. NOW, WHEN THIS RIOT STARTED, THE OTHER THING THAT'S GOING ON AT THE SAME TIME, IS THE PRESIDENT IS ON TELEVISION. DID YOU HEAR ANY OF THAT?

McLaurin: No, I didn't hear, I didn't hear the President.

INTERVIEWER: HE WAS TRYING TO GET THINGS CALMED DOWN. DO YOU THINK THAT GOVERNOR BARNETT SHOULD HAVE ISSUED SOME STATEMENTS OR GONE ON THE RADIO HIMSELF THAT NIGHT? COULD HE, COULD HE HAVE CALMED THINGS DOWN DO YOU THINK?

McLaurin: [coughs] I don't think he could because the message would not have reached those people who were there on the campus. They didn't have a television or a radio there. They were—so I don't think that—now I know this, that had Governor Barnett gotten on the radio and asked for help to come there's, there's just no limit to the number of people that would have come in there. Some came anyhow, from other states, but had, had he asked for help the roads would have been full.

00:15:51:00

INTERVIEWER: DO YOU REMEMBER ANY PART OF THAT RIOT THAT YOU SAW AS YOU WERE DRIVING THAT REALLY STUCK IN YOUR MIND?

McLaurin: No, because—we walked, we walked from where we were over to the, to the alumni building. So we were not driving at any time along the riot route and so, I don't particularly remember any, any one thing that stood out except the firing of that first tear gas canister.

INTERVIEWER: WERE YOU, WERE YOU IN DANGER AS YOU WERE WALKING DO YOU THINK?

McLaurin: No. I was not in danger as I walked.

INTERVIEWER: NOW, WHO DO YOU BLAME FOR THE VIOLENCE? WHO DO YOU—WHOSE FAULT DO YOU THAT WAS?

McLaurin: I think it was the U.S. Marshals'.

INTERVIEWER: COULD YOU EXPLAIN THAT?

McLaurin: Yeah, my idea about it is the U.S. Marshals were the cause of the riot. Had they not fired the tear gas, I certainly don't think, the students would have done anything. I know there was some construction going on on the campus and there was a bulldozer and the marshals went inside the Lyceum building hunting cover and there was one student that got on that bulldozer and he was going to drive it into the Lyceum building—

00:17:09:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

McLaurin: —he didn't know that the, that the bulldozer cranked on gasoline and you have to shift it over to diesel. And, and so he didn't shift, pull the switch, to make it run on diesel and it ran out of gasoline just before he got to the Lyceum building.

INTERVIEWER: GOOD LORD. I'M, I'M—WE'VE GOT TO CHANGE FILM MAGAZINES THERE. I'M GONNA ASK YOU TO TELL ME THAT STORY AGAIN. I THINK WE—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: CAMERA ROLL 219. SECOND MARKER. JUST A MOMENT.

INTERVIEWER: YOU WERE GONNA TELL ME THAT STORY ABOUT THE STUDENTS—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: GO AHEAD.

McLaurin: All right. [coughs] There was a lot of construction going on, on the campus and there was a bulldozer there and the, the Federal Marshals had retreated into the Lyceum building which is the oldest building on the campus. And one student got in the bulldozer, got on the bulldozer and cranked it up. But he didn't know that that they were cranked on gasoline and they had to be turned over to diesel to run. So he was going in the Lyceum building with a dozer—

INTERVIEWER: I'M SORRY, IS THERE A PROBLEM?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: OK, THE BEGINNING OF THE CAMERA ROLL WAS DISCARDED, NO GOOD.

00:18:29:00

[cut]

[slate]

[change to camera roll 219]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: CAMERA ROLL 219. JUST A MOMENT. FOCUS.

INTERVIEWER: WE'RE GONNA GO BACK, AS SOON AS HE'S READY, TO THE BULLDOZER STORY AGAIN.

McLaurin: All right.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: GO AHEAD. I'M SORRY. NOW GO.

McLaurin: There was a considerable amount of construction work going on, on the campus and there was a bulldozer there pretty close to the Lyceum building, the oldest building on the campus. The marshals had retreated into the Lyceum building for cover. And [coughs] one student got on the bulldozer and cranked it. And he did not know that the dozer cranked on gasoline and had to be turned over to diesel to run. So he ran it on gasoline and ran out of gas. He was going into the Lyceum building with the bulldozer. Just as he got to the Lyceum building, the dozer ran out of gas and wouldn't run anymore.

00:19:26:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW WHERE WAS JAMES MEREDITH AT THAT TIME? DID YOU KNOW WHERE HE WAS?

McLaurin: We didn't know where he was, but he was on the campus in a room unbeknown [sic] to any of us or the students.

INTERVIEWER: AND WERE YOU AFRAID THAT HE MIGHT GET KILLED AND WHAT WOULD THAT HAVE MEANT TO MISSISSIPPI? I, I KNOW THE FEDERAL PEOPLE WERE AFRAID THAT SOMEBODY WOULD GET HIM.

McLaurin: Yeah. [coughs] It would have been bad had he, had he been killed. It would have caused a lot of hard feelings toward Mississippi and, and on—in looking back it's better that he wasn't killed.

INTERVIEWER: IN FACT TWO PEOPLE WERE KILLED THAT NIGHT.

McLaurin: That's right. There was one foreign news reporter that was killed there and, and one other man and I can't remember what his position was.

INTERVIEWER: DID YOU HEAR ABOUT THAT ON THE RADIO IS THAT HOW YOU HEARD ABOUT THAT? COULD, COULD YOU TELL US, MAYBE?

McLaurin: I heard it the next day. I didn't hear it that night.

00:20:26:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW YOU WENT BACK TO THE CAMPUS THE NEXT DAY.

McLaurin: I went back to the campus the next day. Some of the members of the state Senate and I drove up there and there was a lot of tear gas around the Lyceum building, still, and a lot of tear gas on the campus. A lot of debris, and school was going on as usual.

INTERVIEWER: WHAT DID YOU FEEL LIKE SEEING YOUR ALMA MATER LOOK LIKE THAT?

McLaurin: Well, it wasn't a good feeling to see my alma mater looking like that. It really wasn't. And we observed the campus and then went back to Jackson.

INTERVIEWER: CAN WE STOP FOR A MOMENT? SOUND THERE. WE'D BETTER FIND OUT WHAT THAT IS.

[cut]

00:21:10:00

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARK IT PLEASE.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: MARKER.

INTERVIEWER: YOU WERE JUST SAYING THAT YOU WERE LISTENING TO THE RADIO THAT NIGHT. COULD YOU—DO YOU REMEMBER ANY OF THE THINGS THEY WERE SAYING AND WHETHER YOU THOUGHT WHO WAS GOING TO WIN AND—

McLaurin: Well, it sounded like the marshals retreated and sounded like the students were getting the best of it. And the marshals fired a lot of tear gas, that's where the tear gas came from, up there. They brought in a lot of marshals that were inexperienced that were not professional marshals that were—worked for the Federal Government in other positions and they put 'em in, in in a position to marshal up there that night and that's probably the reason the fight started. They weren't trained ten [sic].

00:21:57:00

INTERVIEWER: WHY DO YOU THINK PEOPLE IN MISSISSIPPI, AT THAT TIME, WERE JUST—THEY WERE WILLING TO PAY THE COST OF RIOTING, EVEN OF DEATH TO PREVENT THIS? WELL, WHY DID YOU THINK?

McLaurin: People here in the state have a lot of spirit. [coughs] They have a lot of loyalty and they have a lot of love for the state of Mississippi and its principles. And this was a breach of those principles in the eyes of the people and they were willing to stand up for the principles of the state of Mississippi. That's it in a nutshell. [coughs]

INTERVIEWER: WHAT, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY WAS THE COST, NOT IN DOLLARS, BUT IN EMOTIONS AND FEELINGS AND IN—OF THIS INTEGRATION HERE?

McLaurin: Well, of course, the most emotions that came out of it were the James Meredith affair and then as it progressed there was not as much emotion about it and, now, there's not any.

00:23:03:00

INTERVIEWER: AND I, I WAS SORT OF THINKING, YOU KNOW, DID PEOPLE IN MISSISSIPPI FEEL BETRAYED BY THEIR GOVERNMENT OR BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT?

McLaurin: Oh, yes they had strong feelings against the Kennedys and the Federal Government. They really did as a result of this situation.

INTERVIEWER: I WAS WONDERING BECAUSE I, I THINK SOME—SOMEBODY SAID TO ME THAT HE FELT MISSISSIPPI WAS TARGETED BY THE KENNEDYS AND TARGETED BY THE CIVIL RIGHTS GROUP, YOU KNOW, MISSISSIPPI WAS A, A WHIPPING BOY FOR PEOPLE. DO YOU THINK THAT THAT MADE THEM, MADE THEM ANGRY?

McLaurin: It could have been very well been a target. Mississippi could have been.

INTERVIEWER: COULD YOU TALK ABOUT THAT A LITTLE BIT? DO YOU THINK, DO YOU THINK THAT THAT GAVE PEOPLE BAD FEELINGS? WHAT THAT MIGHT'VE BEEN.

McLaurin: Well, the people down here do not like the intrusion by the Federal Government and they saw this as one of those instances. And saw that the Federal Government was trying to ram something down the people of Mississippi that they did not believe in and people here in this state will rise up to the occasion.

00:24:10:00

INTERVIEWER: YOU WERE, YOU WERE GONNA TELL ME WHAT YOU THOUGHT THE EFFECTS ON POLITICS AFTERWARDS WERE.

McLaurin: All right. [coughs] I think that this had a lot to do with the politics in the next primary election which was, in 1963, the following year. Lieutenant Governor Paul Johnson stood up to McShane, at one point, up at Oxford when Governor Barnett could not get up there, the weather was bad and he couldn't fly. And, and Paul Johnson was already there. And he led outside up there [coughs] and was confronted by McShane and Meredith. At one point he was caught with his fist doubled up in a—by some photographer. And it looked

like—that he was drawing his fist back to threaten or to hit McShane. And in the governor's race of 1963 that picture was posted on big boards, billboards in the state, stand up for Mississippi and Paul Johnson won the election handily. [pause] And he had the support of Governor Barnett too. Governor Barnett actively supported Paul Johnson.

00:25:34:00

INTERVIEWER: WHILE I'M ASKING YOU ABOUT PEOPLE, I ASKED YOU ABOUT BARNETT AND I ASKED YOU ABOUT JOHNSON HERE. I'LL ASK YOU ABOUT JAMES MEREDITH. I MEAN WHAT DID YOU THINK OF THIS, OF THIS MAN DOING—MAKING THIS CASE?

McLaurin: Meredith never has amounted to anything. He's—the last I heard he had a, a bar or eating establishment over in Jackson. Possibly he's moved out of the state now, but I—he never has—this is the only big impression that he's ever made to my knowledge in his lifetime.

INTERVIEWER: WHAT DID YOU THINK ABOUT HIM AT THAT TIME? DID YOU THINK THAT HE WAS DOING IT JUST TO MAKE TROUBLE?

McLaurin: Oh, I thought he was doing it as a, as a plant so to speak. I thought that James Meredith was a plant and he was carrying this out to—as an assignment.

00:26:30:00

INTERVIEWER: COULD YOU, COULD YOU TELL ME AN ASSIGNMENT FOR WHOM? DID YOU HAVE ANY SENSE—

McLaurin: From the left wing crowd in this country.

INTERVIEWER: DO YOU THINK YOU COULD YOU MAKE, COULD YOU MAKE THAT A WHOLE SENTENCE?

McLaurin: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: AND TALK—DID YOU FEEL THE WHOLE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT OR THE NAACP OR LEFT WING?

McLaurin: I, I didn't—of course I was not in a position to know who planted James Meredith. I was not on the inside of that, of that crowd, but it was my impression, all along, that James Meredith was not doing this solely and alone on the part of James Meredith. That he was planted to do it.

INTERVIEWER: LET'S STOP FOR A MOMENT AND LET ME THINK ABOUT THIS.

[cut]

00:27:13:00

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARK IT.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: MARKER. GO AHEAD.

McLaurin: [coughs] I blame, of course, the Federal Government for the violence that occurred up there. Through the marshals—they sent some inexperienced marshals up and probably one of those inexperienced marshals was the one that fired the tear gas canister which started the, the rioting. Now, the people here in this state resented the Kennedys trying to push this thing down their throats. And they, they blame the Kennedys through the marshals for the occurrence.

INTERVIEWER: WELL THAT'S TERRIFIC. IF YOU DON'T THINK YOU HAVE ANYTHING ELSE I THINK THAT WE'RE DONE.

McLaurin: All right.

INTERVIEWER: JUST—WAIT, WAIT. WE GOTTA UN-MIC YOU HERE. HOLD ON.

00:28:01:00

[cut]

[end of interview]

© Copyright Washington University Libraries 2016