

*Remarks for the  
40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Desegregation of Ole Miss  
October 1, 2002*

(recognize Mayor Richard Howorth, Reverend Herod, Mr. Doyle)

There's an old Japanese proverb that says, fall seven times, stand up eight. Today, we celebrate the fact that, in this town, in 1962, there were those who stood up for the eighth time.

It's hard to believe it's been 40 years – 40 years since this small town and the university located here became the focus on national and international attention over the admission of a young man who sought nothing more than an education.

After serving in the United States Air Force for nine years, that young man wanted the same thing that thousands of young people across Mississippi wanted – the opportunity to attend Ole Miss, the opportunity to learn, the opportunity to improve himself and build a successful career.

In seeking to fulfill those simple and basic desires, James Meredith made history. He helped change a mindset that had remained linked to the past, shifting it instead to the future and the promise we all share as Mississippians.

It wasn't an easy task. He endured threats. He overcame obstacles. He took on challenges that confronted generations before him.

He did all this, and he did it with a sense of dignity and calm that belied the energy and determination behind his efforts.

There was energy and determination working against him, however – forces focused on holding together a rapidly crumbling belief in the authority of one race over another.

Those forces were in place across the state, from individuals in small communities to the highest level of state government. Those forces were lightning rods for the criticism leveled against Mississippi.

We are here today because James Meredith had more energy and more determination than any of the forces rallied against him, and that's good news for this state and this nation.

It is also important for us to remember that for every individual, every organization, and every office that fought to keep James Meredith out of Ole Miss, there were many more fighting to get him in – and that is another reason for our celebration here today.

We must recognize the courage of those who escorted Meredith to the campus, who supported his acceptance into Ole Miss, who fought by his side in the courts to affirm a right held by every American.

They are the ones we don't always remember, but their fight was strong and helped change our world.

On the night of September 30, 1962, many of them fought harder than ever. National Guard and Reserve units – citizen soldiers called to action – joined regular Army units. 30,000 strong, they gathered in this small town to keep the peace.

It was a difficult night during a difficult time, but right won out.

In the months and years after that night, their contributions went unnoticed – and that is unfortunate. Their dedication to duty and courage in doing right would not be recognized at the time.

And so, 40 years later, I want to say this: To all those who served, who held their ground, who did what was right – we offer our thanks.

The fight they led 40 years ago has helped build the Mississippi we live in today – a state that leads the nation in the number of black elected officials; a state that focuses on the education of all its children; a state that creates jobs for all its people; a state that stands not as a symbol of the past but as a beacon for the future.

We are a place where the dreams of all our people have an equal opportunity to become reality.



One of Mississippi's native sons, one of Oxford's own, perhaps said it best.

“To live anywhere in America today and be against equality because of race and color,” William Faulkner said simply, “is like living in Alaska and being against snow.”

So much has happened in 40 years. The events that occurred in this beautiful, small town changed a state and changed a nation. Most importantly, they changed people – and generations to come will always be thankful.

It's a different time, and we are different people.

We share a common hope for our state, a hope grounded in the belief that we are all created equal, and that we are all brothers and sisters.

It's a hope for all generations.

Thank you.