

Fighting Back (1957-1962)

NARRATOR: In 1954, the Supreme Court said black children would go to school with white. The South said, never.

GOV. ORVAL FAUBUS: In the name of God, whom we all revere, in the name of liberty we hold so dear, in the name of decency, which we all cherish, what is happening in America?

NARRATOR: Was this the start of a new Civil War?

[singing]

WILLIAM CARTER: Desegregation is against the Bible. I find my scripture for this in Genesis 9:27, where God did segregate and separate the three sons of Noah, sending one out to be a servant while the other two remained in the Tabernacle. I say that God has given the word, his Bible. It ain't right for men to end the curse that He's placed upon any human flesh.

SEN. JAMES EASTLAND: All the people of the South are in favor of segregation. And Supreme Court or no Supreme Court, we are going to maintain segregated schools down in Dixie.

SHERIFF MEL BAILEY: It wasn't funny then, it's still not funny. But suddenly we have the Fourteenth Amendment that took 100 years, brought on by the Civil War, suddenly must be complied with. Equal treatment under the law. And that was a resistance. They are not going to get equal treatment. What do you mean? Go to school with my little darling? That is why resistance.

NARRATOR: In the late 1950s, the battle for Civil Rights was fought in the classrooms of the South. The Supreme Court had ruled in a case called Brown vs. Board of Education that segregated schools were unconstitutional under the Fourteenth Amendment. Many Southerners saw the decision as an attack on their heritage and traditions. The battle lines were drawn.

CONSTANCE BAKER MOTLEY: I think we were not really quite prepared for the extent to which the South would resist the implementation of the Brown decision. In fact, the shutting down of the NAACP in Alabama, the resistance evidenced in places like Virginia and Arkansas, the legislative investigations committees in Florida and in other states really frightened us.

NARRATOR: And the white resistance could also be violent. In February, 1956, a black woman named Autherine Lucy was quietly admitted to the all-white University of Alabama. But the night after she arrived, students and town people began a riot. The university suspended Lucy temporarily, it said, for her own protection. And Autherine Lucy sued, claiming that mob rule was being allowed to overturn the law.

AUTHERINE LUCY: What's brought about these actions, I feel, is that lawless elements outside the campus set themselves over and above the law. Their actions were a big discredit to our nation.

THURGOOD MARSHALL: The charge has been made, and made by some fairly moderate people, gradualists, you might call them, that the NAACP, ...(inaudible), is moving too far, too fast. That following the decision of the Supreme Court, you would have been well advised to let things move along gradually for a while. But you can't overthrow the prejudices of 300 years overnight.

THURGOOD MARSHALL: You can't -- Maybe you can't override prejudice overnight, but the Emancipation Proclamation was issued in 1863, 90 odd years ago. I believe in gradualism. I also believe that 90 odd years is pretty gradual.

NARRATOR: Autherine Lucy won her case. But the Board of Trustees expelled her anyway for saying the university had used the riots to keep her out. Across the South, the Lucy case gave resisting whites hope. If they were willing to use violence to fight the law, it seemed they could keep black children in black schools. And it seemed the federal government would not step in. After the riots, the President spoke only of extremists on both sides. He worried, like much of the country, about moving too fast on school integration.

PRESIDENT DWIGHT EISENHOWER: And I personally believe, if you tried to go too far, too fast in laws in this delicate field that has involved the emotions of so many millions of Americans, you are making a mistake. I believe we've got to have laws that go along with education and understanding. And I believe to go beyond that at any one time, you cause trouble rather than benefit.

NARRATOR: It was over a year before the black community would find its chance to fight back, here in Little Rock, Arkansas, 1957. Little Rock was a moderate Southern city in a moderate Southern state. By 1956, both the state universities and the city buses were integrated. Its school board made plans to desegregate slowly. The first year, 1957, nine black teenagers would attend one school, Central High. Little Rock's black leaders were hopeful.

L.C. BATES: We have a very enlightened group of people in Arkansas. I know they have accepted everything else. They accepted bus integration without any fanfare, and they will take the school integration as just another going to school.

HAROLD ENGSTROM: The black children were not getting a chance, and they needed it. They needed more than anyone, and we were very strongly in favor of that, and could see that integration would improve that. But we did, at that stage, have fears, and they were, I guess, just naturally important emotional fears. And so, we needed some help from the officials, the state officials, the county, the city officials, and primarily from Governor Faubus as to what he told the people, whether it was the law or not.

NARRATOR: Governor Orval Faubus of Arkansas was a moderate by Southern standards, a man the black community had supported. But in his last election, he had faced tough opponents, and he knew he'd need the segregationist vote if he wanted to be re-elected. The night before school opened, Faubus made a decision.

GOV. ORVAL FAUBUS: I have, therefore, in accordance with the solemn responsibility and the oath of my office, taken the following action: units of the National Guard have been and are now being mobilized with the mission to maintain or restore the peace and good order of this community. Advanced units are already on duty on the grounds of Central High School.

NARRATOR: The Arkansas National Guard ringed the school with orders to admit only the white students. It shocked the country. State troops were now being used to prevent enforcement of federal law.

At the center of the crisis were these nine teenagers, selected by the school board because of their excellent grades. The first day, eight of the nine went to school together, accompanied by their parents and ministers. They expected some harassment, but no real trouble.

CRAIG RAINS: You could cut it with a knife, the tension. Outside the school were these people who had come in from other parts of the state, other states. There were license plates from all the other states that were there with people who had come in and were outside our school.

NARRATOR: The eight children and the adults with them were turned away by the National Guard. The ninth student, Elizabeth Eckford, had missed the call to gather with the others before school. Elizabeth Eckford walked alone, and met a mob.

REPORTER: Could you tell me your name please? Are you going to go to school here at Central High? You don't care to say anything, is that right?

This girl here is the first negro, apparently, of high school age to show up at Central High School the day that the Federal Court ordered it integrated. She was followed in front of the school by an angry crowd, many of them shouting epithets at her.

ERNEST GREEN: Well, it has to be the most frightening thing, I mean, because she had a crowd of white people behind her threatening to kill her. She had nobody. I mean, there was not a black face in sight anywhere, nobody that she could turn to as a friend, accept to this woman, came out of the crowd and guided her through the mob and onto the bus and got her home safely.

NARRATOR: The black parents and the NAACP went back to court. The leader of the state organization, Daisy Bates, became the students' strongest supporter. The national NAACP saw this case as a showdown for desegregation, and they assisted the local lawyers.

THURGOOD MARSHALL: Well, we consider this case important as one of the segregation cases, but in addition to the fact that this one involves the appearance of the National Guard on the scene, and for the first time in any of our cases, it's the action of the governor that eventually will have to be brought into trial.

INTERVIEWER: And we see it as a state / federal conflict of authority.

THURGOOD MARSHALL: Well, I don't think there's any question about that.

NARRATOR: The question was whether the federal government would assert its authority. The pressure on the President increased. Defiance of federal law seemed to be spreading from Little Rock, here, to North Little Rock, to Nashville, Tennessee, and to Charlotte, North Carolina.

Some people blamed Eisenhower for this resistance, saying his lack of leadership on Civil Rights had encouraged the extremists.

HERBERT BROWNELL: President Eisenhower's position was that he was the president of all the people. He thought that his role was to talk to the moderates throughout the country, including Southern states. He felt that, and was told by many advisors, that Governor Faubus could be reasoned with, and an amicable solution could be found in the Little Rock crisis.

NARRATOR: In mid-September, the President and the governor had a meeting at Eisenhower's vacation house in Newport, Rhode Island.

HERBERT BROWNELL: The President thought that he had persuaded Governor Faubus to go back and allow the black children to enter the high school peaceably. And it was quite a surprise to him -- and he felt let down -- when Governor Faubus decided against allowing the black children to enter the high school.

NARRATOR: Eisenhower had convinced Faubus that ultimately the state could not resist federal authority. Faubus changed his tactic. He simply removed the National Guard, leaving only city police in an explosive situation as the Little Rock Nine entered Central High School.

MELBA PATTILLO BEALS: We entered the side of the building. Thousands of people out front. And we were entering the side, and I could just get a glimpse of this group, and then the car -- I could hear on the car radio, I could hear that there was a mob. And I knew what a mob meant, and I knew that the sounds that came from the crowd were very angry. So, we entered the side of the building very, very fast.

REPORTER: We just got a report here on this end that the students are in. You can see from here some of the action occurring down here.

MAN: Let's go, let's go, let's go.

JAMES HICKS: The three of us represented the black press, that was all. And we were on the mall in front of the school, and the word got to the crowd outside that "the niggers are in the school." Then they said to us, "You come out here as a decoy, and let the other people slip them into the side of this building." So, I said, "Hell, no." Like that, you see.

NARRATOR: The crowd turned on Hicks and on his companions, Moses Newsom and Alex Wilson.

JAMES HICKS: Somebody had a brick in his hand, and instead of throwing the brick, because he was too close, he hit Alex Wilson up the side of his head with this brick. Of course, Wilson was more than six feet tall, an ex-Marine. And he went down like a tree.

MELBA PATTILLO BEALS: The mob was getting passed the wooden sawhorses, because the police would no longer fight their own in order to keep -- to protect us. And so, someone made a suggestion that if they allowed the mob to hang one kid, they could then get the rest out. And a gentleman, whom I believe to be the Assistant Chief of Police said, "How you going to choose? You going to let them draw straws?" He said, "I'll get them out." And we were taken to the basement of this place, and we were put into two cars, grayish, blue colored Fords. And the man instructed them, he said, "Once you start driving, do not stop."

NARRATOR: The rioting was headline news. The nation and the world saw unmistakably the face of resistance. Finally, President Eisenhower realized he had to act. And he did quickly. That night, he sent in the paratroopers of the 101st airborne division.

PRESIDENT DWIGHT EISENHOWER: An extreme situation has been created in Little Rock. This challenge must be met, and with such measures as will preserve for the people as a whole their lawfully protected rights. If resistance to the Federal Court order ceases at once, the further presence of federal troops will be unnecessary, and that blot upon the fair name and high honor of our nation in the world will be removed. Mob rule cannot be allowed to override the decisions of our courts.

GOV. ORVAL FAUBUS: My fellow citizens, we are now an occupied territory. In the name of God, whom we all revere, in the name of liberty we hold so dear, in the name of decency, which we all cherish, what is happening in America?

ERNEST GREEN: When we got into the Jeep -- Into the station wagon, rather, and the convoy that went from Mrs. Bates's house to school had had a Jeep in front, a Jeep behind, and they both had machine gun mounts. And then the whole school was rained with the paratroopers and helicopters hovering around. And we marched up the steps with this circle of soldiers with bayonets drawn. I'd figured that we had really gone into school that day. And walking up the steps that day was probably one of the biggest feelings I've ever had. I figured I'd finally cracked it.

MELBA PATTILLO BEALS: And there was a feeling of pride and hope, that, yes, this is the United States, yes, there is a reason I salute the flag. And it's going to be okay. You know, if these guys just go with us the first time, it's going to be okay.

The troops did not, however, mean the end of harassment. It meant the declaration of war.

[singing]

NARRATOR: It was the beginning of a school year like no other at Little Rock Central High.

ERNEST GREEN: When we got in the school, they then assigned us an individual soldier to walk us from class to class. He waited outside the classroom, and every time the bell rang and classes changed, he would walk us -- We'd have our personal guard walking us to the next class.

MELBA PATTILLO BEALS: The troops were wonderful. You know, there was some fear that they were dating the girls in high school. I don't care what they were doing. They were wonderful. But they couldn't be with us everywhere. They couldn't be with us, for example, in the ladies' bathroom. They couldn't be with us in gym. You'd be walking out to the volleyball court and someone would break a bottle and trip you on the ball. I have scars on my right knee from that.

HAROLD ENGSTROM: Of course, we couldn't have a normal school. What we had to have is close to normal as possible. And you couldn't follow every student around with a guard. You know, the stories were that the male guards would go into the restrooms with the female black students, and you couldn't do things like that. And you couldn't sit with them at the cafeteria. There wouldn't be any integration if you did that. So, I'm proud at what we did and what we didn't do.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think you could get used to going to school with colored children?

STUDENT: Yes, sir, I think so. I mean, if I'm going to have to do it, I'm going to have to get used to it.

INTERVIEWER: Well, now, what about this? Do you think that the trouble is with the students here in the high school and in the schools of Little Rock? Or is it with the parents? Or is it with outsiders? Or where is the trouble?

STUDENT: I think it's the parents. I mean, I saw it, you know, all these parents out here and the man kicking that negro and everything.

INTERVIEWER: And you don't sympathize with that sort of action at all?

STUDENT: No, sir, I don't.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think?

STUDENT: Well, I think it was just downright un-American. I think it was the most terrible thing that has ever been seen in America. I mean, yeah, I'm guessing ...(inaudible) patriotic or something like that, but I always thought that all men were created equal.

CRAIG RAINS: And I began to change from being somebody who was -- I considered myself a moderate to, if I had my way, would have said, "Let's don't integrate, because it's the state's right to decide," to someone who felt a real sense of compassion for these students, and felt like they deserved something that I had. And I also developed a real dislike for the people that were out there that were causing the problems. It was very unsettling to me.

STUDENT: I never had anything to do with any until he came here. They'd never lived, what you'd say, close enough to us, so I was just never around them really.

INTERVIEWER: Isn't that probably what makes it difficult, when you've lived 17 years of your life, and then you start doing something different, all of a sudden?

STUDENT: Well, I think, like, if a Spanish or a Chinese person came here, it wouldn't be hard to get along with them. It's just that the negroes are, what you might say, more different to us than a Spanish person might be.

REPORTER: It's early morning here at 1121 Cross Street in Little Rock, and a new school day is dawning.

MOTHER: Melba.

MELBA PATTILLO BEALS: Yes, mother.

MOTHER: You'd better hurry. You're going to be late for school.

MELBA PATTILLO BEALS: Here I come.

REPORTER: As usual, the girl in the family is running a little late. The girl is Melba Patillo, 15 years old --

MELBA PATILLO BEALS: You know, I worried about silly things like keeping my saddle shoes straight, what am I going to wear today? The things that a 15 year old girl does worry about. But also, which part of the hall to walk in that's the safest? Who's going to hit me with what? Is it going to be hot soup today? Is it going to be so greasy that it ruins the dress my grandmother made for me? I mean, how is this day going to go?

And then, you know, you get out and you get to the car, and then we joke, we'd kind of play with each other. And your stomach would go back into its seat. But then again, we'd get to the head of the NAACP, Daisy Bates's house, and we'd have to face press conference.

INTERVIEWER: Ms. Bates, how do you feel that you're with both of the school authorities, with the city authorities, and with the military authorities, that the situation is developing now?

DAISY BATES: Very well. The military authorities have been very nice to the children, as well as the school board and the city police.

NARRATOR: By Thanksgiving, the Little Rock Nine had become seasoned veterans, giving sophisticated statements to the press at a dinner held by Mr. and Mrs. Bates.

GLORIA RAY: My name is Gloria Ray. I am thankful for having a chance to fulfill my educational desires, and for being a citizen in a country where the federal government respects and protects the rights of all its people.

TERRENCE ROBERTS: My name is Terrence Roberts and I'm a Seventh Day Adventist, and I would like to say that I know that communists enjoy taking advantage of situations such as these to twist the minds of peoples of the world. But I am thankful that in America their actions are being foiled through the efforts of many democratic-minded citizens.

MINNIE JEAN BROWN: I'm Minnie Jean Brown. I'm thankful for the many people who have stood by us and worked diligently in our struggle for a perfect democracy --

NARRATOR: At school, the black teenagers were still being harassed by a few determined whites. Shortly before Christmas, Minnie Jean Brown struck back.

ERNEST GREEN: For a couple of weeks, there had been a number of white kids following us. A series of hassles, continuous -- Calling us niggers. "Nigger, nigger, nigger," one right after the other. And Minnie was -- Minnie Jean Brown was in the lunch line with me. And I was in front of Minnie, and Minnie was behind me. And there was this white kid -- fella -- who was much shorter than Minnie -- Minnie was about five foot ten. And this fella couldn't have been more than five - five, five - four. And he reminded me of a small dog, yelping at somebody's leg. And Minnie had just picked up her Chili.

MELBA PATTILLO BEALS: I could just see her little head click. She consciously said to herself, "No, Minnie Jean, if you do this, you know you won't be here." But then, this was the time of the year when we all didn't want to be there.

ERNEST GREEN: And before I could even say, "You know, Minnie, why don't you tell him to shut up?" Minnie had taken this chili, dumped it on this dude's head. It was just absolute silence in the place. And then the help -- all black -- broke into applause. And the white kids -- the other white kids there -- didn't know what to do. It was the first time that anybody, I'm sure, had seen somebody black retaliate in that sense.

CRAIG RAINS: When Minnie Jean was kicked out of school following the chili incident, maybe 15, 20 students brought cards and gave them out that said, "One down, eight to go." When school was out in May, they still hadn't given up the fight. They came out with a two-colored card that said, "Ike(?), go home, liberation day May 29, 1958," which was graduation day. They were still fighting the battle even then.

NARRATOR: On May 29, 1958, Central High School prepared to graduate 601 white students and Ernest Green.

CRAIG RAINS: We still didn't know whether some outsiders might roll in from some other states and firebomb the place. So, we were a little nervous about it, as was Ernest, and he stood around and joked with the students. We were all joking together there, waiting to process in. And I do remember that as the students' names were called, and they get up and go across the platform and receive their diploma, that I really held my breath when Ernest's name was called.

ERNEST GREEN: There were a lot of claps for the students. You know, they talked about who had received scholarships, who was an honor student and all that as they called their names up. When they called my name, there was nothing. Just a name. And there was this eerie silence. Nobody clapped. But I figured they didn't have to, because after I got that diploma, that was it. I had accomplished what I had come there for.

[singing]

INTERVIEWER: Ernest, what's it been like this year? It's been what you expected?

ERNEST GREEN: Well, from the beginning it wasn't quite what we expected, but adding all things together and putting all the sides together, I think it's turned out to be -- Well, I would say an interesting year. I guess that would be an understatement, but when you put all the sides together, we've had some nice times as well as some rough times. And I think, all in all, it's worked out rather nicely.

MELBA PATILLO BEALS: By the time school had ended, I had sort of settled into myself. And I could have gone on for the next five years. It didn't matter anymore. I was past feeling. I was into just that kind of numb pain where you say, "Hey, I can make it through whatever you'd like, and it just doesn't matter anymore."

But I came home, and, by myself, I walked to the backyard, and I burned my books. And I burned everything that I could burn. And I just stood there crying, looking into the fire, and wondering whether I would go back, but not wanting to go back.

NARRATOR: Melba Patillo didn't have to face that decision. The next year, Governor Faubus closed down all Little Rock's high schools to halt integration. Faubus was so popular that year, he easily won his third term as governor.

Faubus's tactic was also used in Virginia, where the governor closed down school after school.

GOV. LINDSAY ALMOND, JR: There will be no enforced integration in Virginia. I have the highest respect for the President of the United States. If troops are sent into Virginia, they will patrol empty school houses.

NARRATOR: Governor Almond closed schools in Charlottesville and Norfolk and other towns, and he called for unyielding rejection of integration.

The Federal Courts were also unyielding, ruling again and again that this resistance was unconstitutional. But while the court cases were fought, the schools stayed closed, and the children, especially the black children, paid the price. So, the crisis in school desegregation continued.

In the Fall of 1960 in New Orleans, four little black girls were sent to first grade in white schools. It caused a city-wide riot.

This was six years after the Supreme Court's ruling, and segregation was still a fact of life across the South. But in those six years, desegregation had become a fact of political life. Schools were an issue that touched all Americans, black and white. And national leaders were beginning to recognize that.

JOHN F. KENNEDY: Can we honestly say that it doesn't affect our security and the fight for peace when negroes and others are denied their full constitutional rights? When we who -- When we in this country --

NARRATOR: This kind of rhetoric raised black hopes, that the new President would lead the nation in a new commitment to Civil Rights. In 1961, a black man named James Meredith would test that commitment when he filed suit for admission to the University of Mississippi. His lawyers were Jack Greenburg and Constance Baker Motley of the NAACP.

CONSTANCE BAKER MOTLEY: When the Meredith case was filed, it coincided with the Freedom Riders' arrival in Mississippi, which, of course, was not a good context in which to bring that suit. But those were historical developments, which we could not control, because it was a genuine revolution on the part of black people.

NARRATOR: James Meredith called it a new spirit among blacks, as sit-ins and freedom rides spread from other Southern states into Mississippi. That spirit was part of Meredith's own readiness to face the struggles he knew were ahead.

INTERVIEWER: What made you decide on Ole Miss?

JAMES MEREDITH: Well, I thought that I should get an education in my own state. And, of course, Ole Miss, to my knowledge, is the best university in the state. And also, it's the only school that offers the courses that I'm particularly interested in.

INTERVIEWER: You say you were interested in going to the University of Mississippi even as a boy. Were you aware at that time that negroes did not go to the University of Mississippi?

JAMES MEREDITH: Well, I've been aware for a long time of the, so-called, place for the negro. Yes, I've been aware.

INTERVIEWER: Therefore, you've wanted to overcome this barrier since you were a boy?

JAMES MEREDITH: That's right.

MYRLIE EVERS: I think that the faade that he would present to the public was one that was somewhat cold, somewhat cocky. But it was necessary to do that in order to protect himself. Because, after all, he was a human being with feelings, with fear.

GOV. ROSS BARNETT: Friends, I'm a Mississippi segregationist and I am proud of it.

NARRATOR: Mississippi, from it's governor on down, was the most militant of the segregationist states. It was the home of the Citizen's Council, a group formed specifically to defeat integration.

In 1955, the Citizen's Council had helped crush the first attempts of desegregation in the state by using economic threats and violence.

GOV. ROSS BARNETT: We must eliminate the cowards from our front lines. You did not elect me governor, Mississippi, to bargain your heritage away in our Slopefield (?) hotel room.

MYRLIE EVERS: The governor took a very active role in talking about the threats that the state would make on its blacks who would try to enter the school. It was an effort to instill fear in the hearts of blacks, and it was also an effort, and a very successful one to arouse fear and a kind of frenzy in the white community to fight back.

NARRATOR: Myrlie Evers's husband, Medgar Evers, was head of the state NAACP. Evers himself had once tried to integrate Ole Miss, and now he counseled James Meredith. It was a long, hard, legal battle. Finally, after nine months, the district court ruled there was no policy of segregation at Ole Miss.

JUDGE JOHN MINOR WISDOM: It was so unreal for the Mississippi to argue and for the judge to hold that there was no policy of segregation at the University of Mississippi. Everyone in the state of Mississippi, and I am sure almost everyone in the entire country, knew that there was segregation in the state of Mississippi. And then for the university to assert that there was no segregation, and for the court to find that there was no segregation, was just like a land of Fantasia.

NARRATOR: The Court of Appeals reversed the decision, ruling Ole Miss must accept James Meredith. The question, then, as in Little Rock, was, who would enforce the order? A question the court asked directly the President's representative.

BURKE MARSHALL: It was always clear as crystal, and I personally made a commitment, knowing the President would back it up, to the fifth circuit sitting on bunk(?), all nine of them. That whatever force was necessary to make their order effective would be applied.

GOV. ROSS BARNETT: I have made my position in this matter crystal clear. I have said in every county in Mississippi that no school in our state will be integrated while I am your governor. I now call on every public official, and every private citizen of our great state to join with me in refusing, in every legal and every constitutional way, and every way, every matter available, my friends, to submit to illegal usurpation of power by the Kennedy administration.

NARRATOR: The conflict was crystal clear, but the politics were not. The President and his advisors were determined that Meredith would go to Ole Miss. But Kennedy was also determined to avoid direct involvement, which could cost him key Southern Democratic support. The President wanted a political solution, and caught in the politics was Ole Miss.

The Board of Trustees supported Barnett. Most of them did not want to integrate, but they didn't want to see the university shut down because of James Meredith.

STUDENT: Well, none of the students -- and I think I speak for all of them -- want the school closed. And I think if it is closed, it would be too much pressure on Mr. Barnett, and he would have to open it within a day or two anyway.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think if the school had to be closed it would affect the Rebel's, the football team?

STUDENT: Yes, that's one bad thing about it. And all our students are really looking forward to all the football games, and then if the school is closed, we want the ball games played anyway.

NARRATOR: On September 20, the conflict came to a head when Governor Ross Barnett flew up to the Oxford campus of Ole Miss. There, in defiance of the Federal Court order, he personally turned James Meredith away. His actions were legal, he said, based on the pre-Civil War doctrine of interposition.

JUDGE JOHN MINOR WISDOM: The doctrine is that a state may interpose itself between the national government and some action that is thought to be imposed upon the state, or some of its subdivisions, by the federal government. The supremacy clause, which provides and in case of a conflict between the nation and the states, the nation -- The law of the nation prevails, makes hash of the doctrine of interposition. And any lawyer worth his salt knows that. And Barnett was a lawyer who made a good living -- still making a good living -- out of the law, and he knew better than that.

NARRATOR: Five days later on September 25, armed with more court orders on his behalf, James Meredith tried again to register at the University of Mississippi. This time, at its Jackson office, and this time, accompanied by John Doar of the Justice Department and US Marshal James McShane.

REPORTER: This is Hagan Thompson at the State Office building in Jackson. James Meredith has just arrived in the custody of federal officials and apparently making his way up to the tenth floor to register. And in they go, and we'll switch now in just a moment. The crowd is booing lustily. Inside the Wilfolk (?) building, I have a crowd of several thousand inside and out.

NARRATOR: Again, Governor Barnett was waiting.

GOV. ROSS BARNETT: I took an oath when I inaugurated governor of this state to uphold and to try to maintain and perpetuate the laws of Mississippi. Gentlemen, my conscience is clear. I'm abiding by the Constitution of the United States, and the Constitution of Mississippi, and the laws of the state of Mississippi.

JOHN DOAR: I got to admit, I was surprised when I got to the door of the region's office, and when the door opened, there was, on the threshold, was the governor of the state of Mississippi there blocking the door. I got to say to you that I didn't anticipate that. And he had a proclamation, and he read it, in which -- And the line was, "I refuse to register you, under the authority of the laws of the state of Mississippi." So, we left.

NARRATOR: Once again, a governor's action had created a constitutional test. Now, the question was, would President Kennedy use the US Army as President Eisenhower had? Kennedy was still reluctant. Instead, he tried secret telephone negotiations with Governor Barnett.

GOV. ROSS BARNETT: Well, now you don't understand the situation down here.

PRES. JOHN F. KENNEDY: Well, the only thing is, I got my responsibility. This is not my order, I just have to carry it out. So, I want to get together and try to do it with you in a way which is the most satisfactory and causes the least chance of damage to people in Mississippi. That's my interest.

GOV. ROSS BARNETT: Is that right? Well, you'd be willing to wait a while and let the people cool on the whole thing. Well, you make a statement to the fact, Mr. President, that under the circumstances existing, that there'll be bloodshed. You want to protect the life of James Meredith and all other people. And under the circumstances at this time, it just wouldn't be fair to him or others to try to register him.

PRES. JOHN F. KENNEDY: Well, then, at what time would it be fair?

GOV. ROSS BARNETT: Well, we could wait -- I don't know. It might be in two or three weeks, it might cool off.

PRES. JOHN F. KENNEDY: Would you undertake to register him in two weeks?

GOV. ROSS BARNETT: Well, you know, I can't undertake to register him myself, but you all make some progress that way.

PRES. JOHN F. KENNEDY: Well, we'd be faced with ...(inaudible), unless we had your support.

GOV. ROSS BARNETT: I'm going to cooperate.

ROBERT ELLIS: 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 wouldn'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.

NARRATOR: The situation in Oxford was becoming very tense, as hundreds of people streamed into the area to defend Ole Miss and the Southern way of life.

NICHOLAS KATZENBACH: We have had to put throughout -- Not merely the students, but all kinds of people pouring in, in cars, in order to prevent Meredith from being admitted to Ole Miss. One, now, has to remember also that that was the squirrel hunting season in Mississippi, so there were literally hundreds, thousands, of guns. Every pick up truck had a couple of guns in it, and so the situation was really very dangerous.

NARRATOR: Saturday, September 29. The Ole Miss campus was deserted as the students flocked to Jackson for the football game against Kentucky. The halftime speaker was Governor Ross Barnett.

GOV. ROSS BARNETT: I love Mississippi. I love her people... (inaudible). I love and I respect our heritage.

NARRATOR: The next day, Sunday, September 30. Finally, President Kennedy decided the time had come to enroll James Meredith at Ole Miss. He sent several hundred US Marshals to the campus to prepare, and he announced he'd make a special speech to the state that night.

NICHOLAS KATZENBACH: Sunday night when I flew down in the government plane to the airstrip at the University of Mississippi. And we had marshals already down there. We had about four or 500 Marshals sworn in from the prison guards, from the border patrol, from the US Marshals service, from any other place we could find reasonably trained law enforcement officers. And they were, themselves, inert to the students who were returning from a football weekend. And we had no place to sort of hide the marshals. They were around the Lyceum building, which was the center of the campus, and, unbeknownst to us, a -- sort of a tradition and a place of great honor.

JAN ROBERTSON: Students came and, of course, they saw the marshals. I know I got angry when I saw the marshals. It just seemed a betrayal. It made me -- You know, why are these people here when we haven't done anything, and people are behaving themselves? And, you know, what is going on? And I caught myself really with some of these feelings.

NARRATOR: After the marshals had secured their positions, James Meredith was flown into Oxford airport and driven to a secret location at Ole Miss. The crowds didn't know where he was, but they knew he was on campus. And at eight o'clock, just as the President went on the air, Ole Miss turned into a battlefield. Very few people heard the President's words.

PRES. JOHN F. KENNEDY: Americans are free, in short, to disagree with the law, but not to disobey it. For any government of laws, and not of man, no man, however prominent or powerful, and no mob, however unruly or boisterous, is entitled to defy a court of law. The eyes of the nation and all the world are upon you and upon all of us.

NARRATOR: The marshals were ordered not to use guns against the rioters who were shooting and throwing Molotov cocktails. And the rioters were targeting the media, smashing cameras and attacking reporters.

JAN ROBERTSON: There was one freshman girl that had been this little flower of Southern gentility when I had met her. And she came up to me, and her face was absolutely contorted, and I almost didn't recognize her. And she was absolutely furious, because she had picked up a brick and thrown it at a marshal, and it had only hit him in the head and scratched him, and she had not put his eye out.

PRES. JOHN F. KENNEDY: Well, you see, we got to get order up there, and that's what we thought we were going to have.

GOV. ROSS BARNETT: President, please, why don't you give an order, try to remove ...(inaudible)?

PRES. JOHN F. KENNEDY: How can I remove him, governor, when there's a riot in the street and he may step out of that building and something happen to him. I can't remove him under those conditions.

GOV. ROSS BARNETT: People are wiring me and calling me, saying, "Well, you've given up." I said, I had to say, "No, I'm not giving up. I'm not giving up any fight. I never give up. I have courage and faith, and I'm going to win this fight." You understand. It's not just the Mississippi people.

PRES. JOHN F. KENNEDY: I understand, but I don't think anybody in Mississippi or any place else wants a lot of people killed.

GOV. ROSS BARNETT: Oh, no, no.

PRES. JOHN F. KENNEDY: Governor, that's the most important thing.

GOV. ROSS BARNETT: I'll issue any statement, anytime, about peace and violence.

NARRATOR: While the President and the governor argued, the riot worsened. Finally, Katzenbach asked the White House for troops. It took hours for them to arrive, and during the night, 35 marshals were shot, and two people -- a French journalist and an Oxford worker -- were killed. But by dawn, the Army had restored order.

BURKE MARSHALL: Of course the President's going to win in the end. He's got the whole armed forces of the United States. He can call in the Air Force, he can bring Navy ships up the Mississippi River, he can call out the Army as he did, he can drop parachuters in. I suppose he could shoot missiles at Oxford, Mississippi. So, he's going to win at the end.

ROBERT ELLIS: I recall driving to the campus, and I guess when I got to the circle was when I really saw the impact of the riot from the previous evening. 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, James Meredith came to my private office, and I accommodated the registration there.

BURKE MARSHALL: It wasn't a cause for laughter and champagne, but it was a cause for some relief. And it was, the fact that that was over with. I mean, in a way, Oxford had become the symbol of massive resistance in the final gasp of the Civil War, if you want to look at it that way. And it was over. It had ended.

INTERVIEWER: Sir, there's been a great deal of turmoil and conflict. Two people have been killed. Do you have any feelings of guilt? Have you given it any second thoughts?

JAMES MEREDITH: I'm very sorry that anyone had to get hurt or killed. But, of course, I think that's an unfair question to me. I don't believe any of you believe that I had anything to do with that.

INTERVIEWER: How are you getting along in school, sir?

JAMES MEREDITH: Just fine. Just fine.

INTERVIEWER: How are the students? ...(inaudible) talking to, any reactions?

JAMES MEREDITH: No. Just acting like students, I suppose.

INTERVIEWER: Is that kind of a lonely life for you, despite all of these people around you?

JAMES MEREDITH: I've been living a lonely life a long time.

NARRATOR: It was a lonely victory for James Meredith, but it was a victory for him and the country. The Constitution had held and been reaffirmed in a major crisis. Thousands of black people felt the victory, and saw James Meredith as an example to follow, a symbol, like the Little Rock Nine, of their own power to move the nation.