

James Meredith, Preoccupied With Thoughts, Having Scholastic Trouble

Editor's Note: Al Kuettner, UPI southern reporter, who was on the scene when James Meredith entered the University of Mississippi and covered the subsequent riot and other events, has returned to the Oxford campus of the university to report on the situation 11 weeks later. He reports Meredith faces an academic crisis, and describes the atmosphere at school where 20 U. S. marshals and 500 troops are still on duty to enforce the attendance and insure the safety of the single Negro student.

By AL KUETTNER
Oxford, Miss. — (UPI) — James Howard Meredith, through some of the hardest studying any college student has ever done, may pull through at the University of Mississippi. But unless his grade level starts up sharply and quickly, he is a good candidate to flunk out.

The fact that Meredith is a Negro has no direct bearing

— but plenty of indirect bearing — on his academic situation. To put it bluntly, Meredith at the moment is a borderline student. The time of decision could come either at the end of the current semester in January, or in June.

Meredith, who was brought to the campus under court order and the power of federal marshals and the U. S. Army on the riotous night of Sept. 30, began classes shortly after his formal registration the next day.

In the beginning, despite volatile demonstrations and insults against him, Meredith plunged enthusiastically into his studies. With virtually all campus activities closed to him, he spent most of his spare time in his Baxter Hall suite studying.

Undergoes Change
But in the 11 weeks the 29-year-old Negro has been on the "Ole Miss" campus, he has undergone a subtle change. His scholastic record has taken a nose dive. It is known that he has been taking tranquilizers so he can sleep. He has chewed his fingernails to the quick. He nervously gnaws on pencils in class.

Meredith will not discuss his grades or his chances of academic survival. But interviews with students who have classes with him and with other sources at the university permit a reliable look at the dilemma of this contro-

versial young Negro who was the first of his race knowingly admitted to the university. University sources emphasize that the first point to get straight about Meredith is that he is not stupid. He is having his worst trouble with algebra but shows considerable intelligence in the social sciences.

Man Preoccupied
Looking at his textbooks and talking with the man, you get the impression Meredith has the stuff to pass his work — if he weren't preoccupied. But, although he won't say so, Meredith is a man preoccupied. On the surface, things look almost normal on the campus, right down to the glowing Christmas tree at the edge of "The Grove" where the Sept. 30 riot occurred.

The explosive days and nights of demonstrations and violence, of Army jeeps every few feet on the campus, of U. S. marshals dogging Meredith's every footsteps are virtually gone.

The force of marshals assigned to the Meredith case is down to about 20. The Army has pulled out all but about 500 troops, most of whom stay off the campus. The few marshals who "mother hen" the Negro to and from classes try to blend into the landscape. They try to stay out of sight when Meredith goes alone to the university cafeteria. Hardly a head is turned these days as he moves about the campus.

But Meredith knows they are there. They sleep in the room next to him at Baxter. They answer his telephone as a secretary would. At least once, human nature being what it is, Meredith is known to have given his guardians the slip briefly.

Denies Any Effects
Meredith denies that the little things which happen to him on the campus have any effect. But they happen. There was the boy in one class, two seats away, who periodically flicked on a cigarette lighter, causing it to play "Dixie" every time the thing lit up. By the end of class, there was an uproar of laughter.

In algebra class, it takes another tack. On several occasions, Meredith has gone to the blackboard with classmates to copy down equations assigned by the professor for calculation on the board.

Unable to handle the as-

signment, Meredith takes his seat. The class is asked if anyone can help out with the answer. Hands go up enthusiastically. The teacher then asks Meredith if he would like a classmate or the professor to help him out. Meredith chooses the professor.

He says little in class, often just answers the roll. In English literature, Meredith is in a class of about 40. It's a lecture type class requiring quite a bit of note taking. Meredith takes few notes.

Exams Next Month
The weeks of lectures, of blackboard experiences with cubic equations, irrational algebraic expressions and solution of linear equations and of pop quizzes are about over.

Following the Christmas vacations, final exams are set for Jan. 17-25.

Meredith needs good grades on his finals to pull up his average. If he — or any student — ends the semester with a grade between 1 and 2 (E and D), he could petition the committee on admissions to let him in next semester on academic probation. If a student's semester grade is below 1 (E) he normally would be dismissed.

If readmitted on probation, such a student would have to pull his average up to a 2 (D) in the next semester or he would be finished.

Meredith denies that the little things in his life on the campus have made a mountain of pressure for him. In an interview, he said:

"The thing that worries me is that the atmosphere that caused the federal forces to be here in the first place is still here. Nothing has been done to change that."

"I am not concerned about the little things. I am concerned about the fact Negroes don't have adequate opportunities for getting an education. The little things are simply part of the system that keeps Negroes down."

"The system is what caused the riot. My ultimate goal is to find a cure for the system and I am only important as I can affect the change."

Comments on NAACP
Meredith was asked about reports that he is on the outs with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People which helped finance his court fight to enroll at Ole Miss.

"I am not at dagger's point with the NAACP or anyone," he said. "But I have never felt the NAACP had exclusive responsibility where Negro problems are concerned except for the fact that the NAACP is an established organization."

Meredith said the battle he is fighting is "not a day to day situation. I will be in this five years from now, ten years."

The Justice Department estimated it already has cost almost \$450,000, not counting military costs of \$3,850,000, to keep Meredith in the university. The government is prepared to carry on indefinitely so long as Meredith is a student.

School News

Hedrick Junior High

The Hedrick seventh, eighth and ninth grade choirs will put on their annual Christmas show Dec. 19. Carroll Graber and Gary Love are the instructors of the presentation. The Hedrick orchestra, directed by John Drysdale, also will be in the presentation. The narrator is Paul Brainerd, who will speak between the singing. There will be a Nativity scene along with the singing.

The Hedrick basketball teams and the wrestling teams are doing well this season. The ninth grade basketball team and the eighth have not lost a game yet.

The canned food drive at Hedrick was successful. We had a contest to see which home room could bring the most canned food. Room 306 won. They brought the most food percentage wise and won the ice cream feed.

Hedrick has their Christmas tree up in the lower hall. The Christmas tree is 15 feet tall and is covered with decorations. The tree was decorated by the Future Homemakers of America.

Ray Lewis, eighth and seventh grade English teacher, is the head of the annual staff. They have been getting the book ready for publication. The book won't be out until the end of the year.

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