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# Robert Baker to The Washington Post, 28 September 1962

Robert E. Baker

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VIA WESTERN UNION

Direct to the Washington Post, Washington, D.C.

Press Rate Collect

(BAKER TO KNEELAND FOR OUTLOOK) OXFORD, Miss. -- It was

bound to happen in Mississippi.

The state's defiance to the Federal Government during the past ten days was not an accident. Nor should it have come as any surprise. From the moment the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed compulsory racial segregation in the public schools in 1954, it was assumed that Mississippi would resist the hardest.

For this is the state, more than any other of the Deep South and former slave-holding states, that has remained closest to the great Civil War of a century ago. This state, more than any other, clings almost desperately to the romanticism of the Rebel efforts, to the stories of gallantry by the boys in gray and the legends of the Yankee invaders.

(more)

After Reconstruction, this state, more than any other, set about ~~establishing~~ re-establishing white supremacy and has held on to that way of life with a vengeance.

It was in Mississippi that the ~~State~~ Governor was arrested by the Federal Government in 1865. It was in Mississippi that ~~the~~ newly-freed Negroes occupied State and Federal offices. It was here that the whites in the 1890's seized solid control through the Democratic Party and ousted the Republicans and the Negroes from office once and for all. The Negro was disfranchized then and, more than in any other Southern State, disfranchized now.

As the other Southern states became more and more a part of the mainstream of American growth and progress, Mississippi remained in a backwash. Her plantation economy never filtered enough affluence

down to the man, black or white, on the lower levels, ~~and the politicians~~

*Mississippi developed more poor whites than other states, and the politicians gave them the Negro to hate,*  
~~gave the poor whites the Negro to hate.~~ No State has produced the

stream of Bilbos and Rankins -- and now Gov. Ross R. Barnett -- that

Mississippi has. ~~Demagoguery~~ Racial demagoguery was the accepted,

the necessary, path to nearly every political office.

(more)

Mississippi has clung to its magnolia tradition as most of the rest of the nation has been swept along with the changing world, perhaps because there isn't as much else to cling to here.

But with it all, white Mississippi has a fierce pride in its way of life, ~~and a defensively defensive pride, perhaps~~ Even more

than ~~Texas~~ Texans, ~~Mississippians~~ white Mississippians rise quickly to defend any hint of criticism from outside. In the last few years,

*when resistance ~~and was brought~~*  
when the Emmet Till murder case and the Charlie Mack Parker ~~murder~~ lynching brought adverse publicity on its shoulders, Mississippi advertised widely

throughout the ~~United~~ land that it was the "most lied about state in the Nation."

When the Supreme Court's segregation cases were decided eight years ago, Mississippi was in the midst of an out-migration both *of* in whites and Negroes. They were leaving because their home state

*It has been only in recent years that ~~Negroes~~ whites have outnumbered Negroes. Yet*  
lacked opportunity. Frightening numbers of graduates from white

colleges here leave the state to make their careers, leaving behind

those graduates more happy with the Mississippi tradition, serving to

continue and strengthen resistance to change. And many of those Mississippians

who left have risen high among the nation's leaders today.

*(more)*

~~and so it was this~~

It was therefore an easy, an almost natural thing, for the White Citizens Council to be born in Mississippi as the answer to the Supreme Court decision. Unlike in other states, the white citizens council became an all-powerful political force, supported by tax money.

With the citizens council surveying the state, <sup>guarding</sup> ~~disciplining~~ thought and free discussion, and with a press that with few exceptions followed the party line, Mississippi had less of a moderating influence than other states. The moderates were silenced.

Into this picture came a Jackson lawyer named Barnett, a two-time loser in <sup>previous</sup> gubernatorial races, before, who ran for Governor in 1959 on a white supremacy platform and won in a breeze <sup>with full citizens council support and confidence</sup>.

Even then, it didn't appear to ~~Mississippians~~ white Mississippians that desegregation was any closer than a generation or so away. But again Mississippi wasn't reckoning with the rapidity of this changing age, <sup>the Southern symbols of</sup> and Richmond, Atlanta and Memphis acceded to the times we are in.

~~The Governor had sworn many times that never would Mississippi accede while he was in the drivers seat. Meanwhile, he was looked upon~~

(more)

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Barnett was looked upon by some as a pleasant sort of blunderbuss. He had been severely injured during his campaign when he absent-mindedly walked into a whirling airplane propeller. He got into trouble with the poor folks when he ~~was~~ gold-plated the guest bathroom in the Governor's Mansion. He provided laughs when he absent-mindedly kept referring to the "fine Christian audience" he was addressing at a Jackson synagogue. People told stories of his trip with other Governors to Latin America, when he warned ~~his~~ a citizen of Brazil, the most thoroughly integrated of all nations, that it faced trouble "when they try to integrate you." At the University of Mississippi, some satires of Barnett turned up in student theme papers.

But when the Federal Courts finally ordered James H. Meredith, a ~~Negro~~ 29-year-old Negro Air Force veteran, into the University of Mississippi, Barnett responded in the way that undoubtedly has the approval of the majority of white people ~~in the State behind~~ him. ~~By~~

(more)

He proclaimed the discredited Doctrine of Interposition.

He massed his state policemen and deputy sheriffs and repulsed Meredith and his Federal escorts. He defied the Federal Courts, the Justice Department, the Federal Government. He ~~spoke of the glory of~~ propounded State Sovereignty and States Rights, and white Mississippians gloried anew in their tradition, legends, loves, hates, pride.

*the majority of* Neither white Mississippians nor Barnett himself ~~seemed to be~~ *indicated*

that they would be satisfied with less than the Governor ~~was~~ seized and jailed. While the Federal Government seemed to be leaning over backward *to exercise* and ~~exercizing~~ admirable restraint in its efforts to carry out its task, it was apparent that only drastic action would win the battle.

Some observers have expressed surprise at the crowds of University of Mississippi students that shouted "Nigger! Nigger!" at Meredith at his first appearance on campus ten days ago. Yet, with natural college exuberance aside, it must be remembered that for eight years -- since many of these students were pre-teen age -- they have heard nothing from their State leaders except defiance, warnings of "mongrelization" and "communist inspired plots."

*(more)*

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Ross R. Barnett is the hero of most of them now, for they are but the product of their environment.

If Mississippi were to succeed in its defiance, and the Federal Government were to pull off, or settle for a compromise or stalemate, then the country may expect Alabama to follow suit.

It was Alabama that first set the pattern for defiance when ~~Alabama~~ Autherine Lucy, a Negro, failed to remain <sup>enrolled</sup> at the University of Alabama when her entrance was met by violence in 1956. No Negro has since been admitted to a public school there and Alabama has a Governor-elect in George O. Wallace who talks <sup>the way</sup> as Barnett acts.

But if Mississippi loses decisively, through closed schools or economic stagnation or disastrous violence, then the chances of a repeat performance in Alabama is lessened.

In that case, the Nation may <sup>now</sup> well be witnessing the spectacular show last grandiose ~~show~~ of defiance on the racial front in the South.

Mississippi and Barnett will have capped the string of battles over the last eight <sup>even</sup> years, dimming the spectre of Little Rock.

~~This~~ The nation may well be witnessing the <sup>Deep South's</sup> ~~South's~~ last stand. *Endit x*

*H*

*Robert E L Baker  
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de Miss Hotel*