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Small Voice Yields Racial 'T

By ANNE WETZEL
Clarion-Ledger Education Writer

10/4/78

OXFORD — In the midst of an angry debate here on whether national statistics before and since the U. S. Supreme Court's landmark Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education show whether the status of blacks in Mississippi have significantly improved, a faint voice in the audience proclaimed a simple truth.

"When I left this university in 1965, this meeting couldn't have taken place," the faint voice said.

The voice was James Silver, now 71, ad a retired University of Southern Florida professor. In 1965 he was a professor of history at Ole Miss.

James Silver, once an unpopular figure with some Mississippians because of his strong support of the decision to admit James Meredith as the first black stu-

dent at Ole Miss and the author of "Mississippi, the Closed Society," returned to Ole Miss for the fourth Chancellor's Symposium on Southern History. He was there as a guest of the history department.

"I've always felt that Ole Miss was a good school," Silver said in an interview. "In looking back, I think it has regained what it had lost. These symposiums are indicitive that the department of history is back where it was in the 50's, and we had a cracker jack department then."

What disturbed Silver most about the audiences response to Wednesday afternoon's lecture by Henry Levin, professor of education at Stanford University was that "the audience isn't seeing the forest through the trees".

Levin, whose topic was "Education, Economics and Race; the dialectics of Brown," quoted heavily from

'ruth' at Ole Miss Conference

national statistics concerning the educational and economic impact of the Brown, in which the High Court held that "separate but equal" schools for blacks and whites were unconstitutional.

Levin argued that the Brown decision had a far greater impact on society than just the desegregation of schools.

He said statistics prove that increasing their level of education has increased the economics level of blacks. Levin said the Brown decision in accelerated the integration movement that was already under way before 1954.

However, in the heated debate that followed Levin's speech several people from the audience attacked the validity of the statistics quoted. The challengers said the statistics could not be used to show that blacks are well off from either an economic or

educational standpoint.

Silver said he believes the challengers from the audience were "too statistic minded."

"Everyone who said we're worse off should take a look at Aaron Henry (president of the state NAACP) who was here today and who has devoted 30 years to improve the conditions of blacks. To say he has failed is nonsense," Silver maintained.

Silver said that blacks now have the "equality of chance."

"That doesn't mean equality, but they can come to school and do something they couldn't do 10 years ago if they've got the guts to stick it out. What happened is tremendous," he said.

Silver left Ole Miss in 1965 while the ashes of the Meredith incident were still smoldering, to teach at See Small Voice, Page 2B

Small Voice Speaks 'Truth'

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Notre Dame Univeristy in Louisiana. After five years he went to teach at the University of Southern Florida. He has returned to Ole Miss twice since on speaking engagements.

Now, almost 20 years since he left the Ole Miss faculty, Silver says he is too old and too removed to fully understand the significance of a symposium and its impact on the University, but he's encouraged by the fact that it has brought noted scholars from across the country to the once segregated institution.