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Ross Barnett I have no re

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# At 84, the former governor is still a very

By KAREN HINTON  
Jackson Daily News Staff Writer

He didn't understand the question at first. The former governor of Mississippi is a little hard of hearing.

"Now what? What did you say?" **Ross Barnett** asked.

Sitting in his office in the **Barnett Building** in downtown Jackson, **Barnett** swivels his chair, stares into space and then answers flatly: "I have no regrets. No apologies to make."

Twenty years ago, the entire nation watched while white Mississippians displayed a violent, terrifying side to their personalities in the riots preceding James Meredith's enrollment at the University of Mississippi.

Many historians have blamed **Barnett** for, at the very least, doing little or nothing to calm the furor. **Barnett** calls his critics "nuts and fruitcakes."

"It was good I stood up for what I said I would do," **Barnett** said of his resistance to Meredith's admission, disclaim-

"I wouldn't do one iota of difference today with the same law we had then. I did what any honorable person ought to have done. Do you think I ought to have violated my oath of office?"

"My conscience would have hurt me for as long as I would have lived. I'm not that kind of a pussyfooter."

Judge Richard Rives of the 5th Circuit, musing on the appropriate punishment for **Barnett**, who faced criminal charges for contempt of court, said:

"You sentence a man to three years for stealing a car, and here's a man who almost destroyed a university."

But **Barnett**, who defied court order after court order during the struggle to admit the first black student to Ole Miss in 1962, says today:

"Whoever said I almost destroyed Ole Miss is a nut."

Rives later changed his mind and was quoted as saying, "**Barnett** was as racist as a man could get, but it (a trial) would accomplish nothing. It was better to let

annually at the Neshoba County Fair with renditions of *Dixie* and *You Are My Sunshine*.

**Barnett**, branded by some as one of the state's most racist governors, says he has always liked "black folks," though the word "nigger" occasionally slips into his speech.

The telephone rings. **Barnett** talks patiently with a client, hangs up and comments, "That's a man who was badly hurt in a wreck. And he wants me to come to the hospital. I don't know if he's white or black."

**Barnett**, who said "Never" to integration and "Always" to segregation, is reluctant to talk about the effects of integration on Mississippi's school system. Questions about it noticeably irritate him.

Q: What has been the result of integration today?

A: "I'm not saying either way . . . I don't want to comment on that. I don't want to make a lot of black folks mad

**Barnett's** view of the ago at Ole Miss. Many historians, includ Mississippians.

James Silver, an Ole fessor in 1962, said that. flammatory journalism **Barnett's** fire-breathing r the state's climate of u ror.

"We must either subr ful dictates of the feder stand up like men and ER! . . . We will not drin genocide," **Barnett** said

**Barnett** disclaims a for the riot, the deaths a ing that if Meredith ha politician" and U.S. A Robert Kennedy a "nu could have been avoide

"I don't feel respo (deaths). Somebody g hour. I'm sorry to hear