
Bob Dylan, “Oxford Town”



Source: Marion S. Trikosko, U.S. News & World Report

In 1962, James Meredith became the first African American to attend the University of Mississippi. It took a ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court and the presence of hundreds of U.S. Marshals and members of the National Guard to insure that Meredith would be allowed to attend. Riots, resulting in two deaths, accompanied his arrival at the university, located in the town of Oxford.

Bob Dylan, one of many singers who took up the cause of the Civil Rights movement, wrote “Oxford Town” in response to the integration of the University of Mississippi and the riots that followed.

Excerpt from Lyrics

*He went down to Oxford town
Guns and clubs followed him down
All because his face was brown
Better get away from Oxford Town*

*Oxford Town around the bend
He comes to the door, he couldn't get in
All because of the color of his skin
What do you think about that, my friend?*

Questions for Discussion

1. How does Dylan describe the events that took place in Oxford, Mississippi?
2. Does Dylan mention James Meredith or the university by name? Why do you think he made this choice?
3. What is the tone of Dylan’s voice as he sings the song? How does he feel about the events that took place in Oxford?
4. Why might Dylan and other white folksingers have become involved in the Civil Rights movement? Might they have played a role in convincing white listeners to become involved in the movement?