

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

November 22, 1955

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD



Having served more than eight years as Field Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and during this period having faced every manner of problem that comes within the realm of race relations, I am especially alert to racial conditions and situations that will eventually affect the welfare of the country, and which will particularly bring headaches and possibly severe criticism to the Administration. It is for these reasons alone that I presume to present my considered judgment on a dangerous situation that is now afflicting the country.

The killing of the young Negro, Emmett Till, in Mississippi this fall, has received official attention from this Administration through the Office of the Attorney General. Under normal circumstances, this would be enough to satisfy most people; that the police arm of the Federal Government was alert to all situations where possible Federal laws have been violated. However, this particular situation is so fraught with emotion because of the circumstances under which the crime was committed, and the fact that the victim was a youngster, that normal methods of dealing with the usual case of crime are not completely acceptable to all of the interested parties.

Because of many years of investigating lynchings, mob violence, and various forms of terrorism in the country, I am able to spot signs that indicate that we are on the verge of a dangerous racial conflagration in the Southern section of the country. My official duties in the past few months have taken me to the deep South, to the Middle West, and throughout the Eastern seaboard, and the one theme that is on the lips and minds of all Negroes is the injustice of the Till case, and the fact that nothing can be done to effect justice in this case. The warning signs in the South are all too clear: the harrassed Negro is sullen, bitter, and talking strongly of retaliation whenever future situations dictate.

Mass meetings are being held by the scores across the country, and being attended by thousands of people who want to hear the story from the mother of the boy or other witnesses. The Till case is a subject of unceasing publicity in the press, and the subject of numerous Sunday sermons in the

pulpits of the land. An example of the passion that this case has generated was indicated to me in Youngstown a few weeks ago, when I attended services at a prominent church, and heard the well-educated minister of the congregation state that: "we Negroes lynch too easily and we must learn to resist with everything in our power if we would put a stop to this barbarous custom".

It is a well-known fact that the Negroes in Mississippi have formed an underground, and are determined to protect themselves by methods that, if used, can only lead to further terror and bloodshed.



On the other hand, a frightening power has been built in Mississippi by the anti-desegregation White Citizens Councils, and their principal method is one of economic terrorism. These Councils are fanning out throughout the South, and they have created a climate of fear and terrorism that holds the entire area in a vise.

As a member of the White House Staff, I am sitting in the middle of this, and I have been accused of being cowardly for not bringing this situation to the attention of the Administration, and requesting the President to make some kind of observation on this unwholesome problem. My mail has been heavy and angry, and wherever I go, people have expressed disappointment that no word has come from the White House deploring this situation. I always point out, of course, that our Attorney General has followed this situation with interest and skill, and that he will act when and if Federal laws are violated. But this does not still the protestations. There is a clamor for some kind of statement from the White House that will indicate the Administration is aware of, and condemns with vigor, any kind of racist activity in the United States.

I feel the time has come when it might be advisable for Governor Adams or Vice President Nixon to invite to Washington a dozen of the prominent Negro leaders in the country and sit down and exchange views on this very dangerous problem. It will not be a matter of committing the Administration to anything, but it will be a demonstration for the whole country to see that the responsible leaders, white and Negro, have a deep concern about this situation and wish to sit down and talk about it intelligently and dispassionately. There is precedent for this kind of meeting, for in my lifetime it has happened several times with Presidents Hoover, Roosevelt and Truman. Meetings of this kind always have a steadying effect upon the Negro leaders, for they are able to go out through the country and assure the Negro citizens that the head of the country is concerned about their welfare and will exercise the prestige of his office to prevail upon all to exercise common sense and common decency in dealing with the situation.

I would be happy to sit down with anyone, and help work out a list of invitees for such a meeting, and I feel that time is of the essence.

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