

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

June 24, 1958

MEMORANDUM FOR THE FILES

Subject: Meeting of Negro Leaders with the President - June 23, 1958

The President met with: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., President,  
Southern Christian Leadership Conference

A. Philip Randolph, International  
President, Brotherhood of Sleeping Car  
Porters



Roy Wilkins, President, NAACP

Lester B. Granger, Executive Secretary,  
National Urban League

Also present were Attorney General Rogers, Frederic E. Morrow and myself.

After introductions, Mr. Randolph, as the spokesman, laid before the President the attached statement. He prefaced the written statement by commending the President strongly for the many efforts he has made to advance the political and economic status of the American Negro. He said that they would not be present at the meeting if they did not have the firm conviction that the President was a man of courage and integrity who had shown leadership and brought about accomplishment in this field. He spoke strongly and favorably about the President's action in the Little Rock episode. He then proceeded, beginning on page 4, to read the nine recommendations contained in the statement, including the closing paragraphs. Following this, he asked Dr. King to speak.

Dr. King said he wanted to comment about the first three of the recommendations and that, as a minister, he felt these recommendations were designed to help mobilize the emotions of the spirit which, in turn, would aid in the fight for abolishment of segregation. He said that a Presidential pronouncement as called for in the first recommendation would give a moral boost to the Nation. Speaking of the second

recommendation, which calls for a White House conference, he is convinced, he said, as a southern Negro, that the social, political and economic reprisals which exist today in the South prevent the goodwill of white Southerners from being expressed. He felt such a conference would provide the forum for expressions of such goodwill. In urging action on the third recommendation, he said that wider dissemination of government information on this subject would provide the factual basis needed to educate further the communities and localities throughout the South and the Nation. He felt that without action along the lines of these three recommendations there would be a continuation of delaying tactics. He agrees that morals cannot be legislated (only education and religion can do this, he said) and that internal attitudes are hard to change, but that action is possible to attempt to control the external effects of such attitudes.

Mr. Wilkins emphasized the President's own record in the field of improvement of Negro rights, recalling the fact that **Armed Services** integration is now about complete, and that the **President** was responsible for the passage of the **Civil Rights Bill** last year. He then spoke on behalf of recommendation No. 4 and urged that the **Administration** seek again the inclusion of **Part III** which had been deleted during the heat of the debate last Fall. This is needed in order that more legal authority be provided the **Attorney General**. He said that the **Justice Department** was "inhibited, so it is reported" because they lack this necessary statutory authority. Wilkins then said he was "dismayed, distressed and angered" by the **Lemley** court decision of last Saturday. He said that the picture had been best described by a porter in New York City as he was leaving to come to Washington. The porter said that the decision has "given them a map," meaning that this decision has explained to the segregationists how best to proceed to defeat school integration. He then spoke of the necessity of protecting the right to vote, explaining that in one community in the South where a college was located, Negro faculty members with **Masters** and **Doctors** degrees were unable to qualify to vote because of the rigid tests administered by local registrars. He felt that when more Negroes were able to vote in the South this would bring about peaceable change and adjustment. He said that the right to vote was the "most effective and bloodless way" to solve this whole problem. He said that it was natural for a colored person who felt aggrieved in a local community to want to turn to Washington, the **White House** and the **President** for aid. He then related to the **President** an incident which occurred during the **President's** visit to **Oklahoma City** last Fall in which eight high school science scholarship winners were presented to the **President**. One of them was a colored girl, he said, for whom this would never have been possible if integration had not taken place in that city in recent years.



Mr. Granger recalled to the President that, in his lifetime, he has seen three different phases of Negro activity in the field of civil rights: during his World War I days, during the time of the depression, and today. He said he had not known a period when the bitterness of the Negro showed "more signs of congealing" than today. Mr. Granger continued, saying the Negro had been led to believe that there was hope and that progress was being made when, suddenly, it appears stopped. He said this was the reason for the reaction by the Negroes at last month's Summit meeting to the President's remarks, and because of which he assumed the President might be disappointed. He referred to Agnes Meyer's recent article in the Atlantic Monthly, calling her a person of "goodwill, even though not always of good judgment." He said that in this article she had "misquoted" (meaning misstated, I believe) the New York City School Board efforts. He said this type of article only brings about more confusion by well-meaning white people. He commended the kind of leadership exhibited by Dr. King in the South, who, he said, "kept alive a free spirit."



The Attorney General commented that the reason, in his mind, for any bitterness which might exist, is the very fact that progress is being made today, pointing out that in prior years speeches were made but progress did not follow, and so hope never really built up. Now, with the progress of the past recent years, some of the hopes have become realized; occasional setbacks or delays should be regarded only as temporary. Mr. Rogers said that we are defending the laws by aggressive court action whenever and wherever it appears that the legal facts are sufficient to bring them to a successful conclusion. He emphasized that it would be extremely unwise and damaging to institute court action in every individual complaint situation. He then said that he thought the statement lacked a written preface of the type which Mr. Randolph had just made orally (commending the accomplishments of this Administration) and gave no appearance of appreciation for the gains of recent years. He also recalled Mr. Wilkins' willingness to abandon Part III of the proposed Civil Rights Bill during the heat of last year's debate.

The President then spoke, saying that he was extremely dismayed to hear that after 5 1/2 years of effort and action in this field these gentlemen were saying that bitterness on the part of the Negro people was at its height. He wondered if further constructive action in this field would not only result in more bitterness.

Mr. Granger, seconded by Mr. Randolph and Mr. Wilkins, hastily assured the President that the bitterness they referred to was not directed to the President or the Administration but only to the communities in which apparent though slow progress was being made and then stopped; that the bitterness consisted of individual reactions to obstacles met.

The President spoke forcefully about the need for diligent and careful perusal by the Federal Government of any actions in this field. He did not comment in any way on the Judge Lemley decision or the Little Rock affair. He said he did not propose to comment - and knew they did not expect him to - on the recommendations which he had before him, but said that he would obviously be glad to consider them. He then said that there might be at first blush some value in convoking a White House conference, but added that he was doubtful if it would be productive of anything.

Mr. Randolph answered this last observation by saying he thought the President might give it a high moral tone, to which the President replied there was only so much any President could do in opening such a meeting. Mr. Rogers agreed with the President and said this could only serve as a sounding board for the reaffirmation of previously announced positions by spokesmen (acknowledged and otherwise) in this area. Mr. Rogers emphasized again that the President had directed him to take aggressive actions in all matters affecting the Federal authority. The President agreed and then emphasized the importance of voting rights.



The meeting concluded with the President indicating his appreciation of meeting with the group.

In the press conference which followed the meeting, it appeared to me that the positions taken by the four leaders were basically very honest and favorable recitals of what had occurred at the meeting. The news accounts speak for themselves, but I took note of one significant question asked by Louis Lautier (only Negro member of the National Press Club Association) of Mr. Wilkins: he asked what had occurred in the meeting which had changed his attitude. He repeated this to mean Mr. Wilkins' attitude toward the President from the position taken a month ago by him. Mr. Wilkins was very indignant and didn't really respond to the question. Efforts were made to bait Wilkins in the press conference inasmuch as he seems to be the most militant of the group, but I would say that he held himself under control.

  
Rocco C. Siciliano

## A STATEMENT TO PRESIDENT DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER

The process of peaceful advancement toward equality of citizenship for all Americans has reached a critical turn.

New economic and cultural forces in our nation's life are changing the pattern of Negro-white relations. Any effort to impede this process will affect unfavorably all American society. Frequently tension is an inherent element of basic social change. Thus it is not a matter of choice between an unjust status quo with social peace, and integration with tension. The nation can adopt forthrightly a bold program which moves through tension to a democratic solution; or it can depend upon evasion and compromise which purport to avoid tension, but which in reality lead the entire society toward economic, social and moral frustration.

Years of educational, legislative and legal effort to bring the status of Negro Americans in line with the guarantees of the Constitution have led, inevitably, to the determination by our highest court that enforced racial segregation and its attendant discrimination in publicly-owned facilities is morally and legally indefensible.

At every intermediate stop along the way to this conclusion bitter opposition was encountered, but justice and common sense have heretofore prevailed; the unity of the nation has been strengthened; its moral fibre has been renewed.

Today, however, the last-ditch resistance to the application of



principles long since accepted by most of the nation has assumed a significance beyond the question of racial justice, important as that is. The welfare of the whole country is involved in the issues with which this presentment is concerned.

Presently there is manifest a pattern of calloused disrespect for law. Moral values have been corrupted. Mob violence has emerged as an instrument to maintain the status quo.

The basic constitutional freedoms of speech, association, assembly and redress of grievances, vital to all Americans, have been perverted, abridged or denied through arbitrary practices or cynical legislation in the states.

State and local office holders of high and low station and national legislators, all sworn to uphold the Constitution, have incited to disobedience of the law and have campaigned nationally for support for their position. In community after community, fear of reprisals or of scorn has reduced to a whisper the reproach a moral people should feel for immoral behavior.

It is no secret that the foreign relations program of our nation has been hampered and damaged by the discriminatory treatment accorded citizens within the United States, solely on the basis of their race and color. In our world-wide struggle to strengthen the free world against



the spread of totalitarianism, we are sabotaged by the totalitarian practices forced upon millions of our Negro citizens.

These citizens have exhibited unparalleled patience in the face of decades of proscription and persecution. They have placed unfaltering trust in the guarantees of the Constitution and in the orderly processes of the courts. Today they are frustrated and angry. In their resentment and despair, an increasing number of them are questioning whether their forbearance and respect for orderly procedure are rewarding.

The decision of Federal Judge Harry J. Lemly reversing school integration in Little Rock and postponing further effort until 1961 has shocked and outraged Negro citizens and millions of their fellow Americans. This opinion is being construed, rightly or wrongly, as a green light to lawless elements in their defiance of Federal authority.

We have come to this pass largely because we have not recognized that adjustments of the magnitude called for in this vast social change cannot be undertaken effectively without planned effort of similar magnitude. We cannot combat pneumonia by prescribing an occasional tablet of aspirin and a goblet of goodwill.

Just as our Government has moved with pace and imagination to meet the revolution of rising expectations in other parts of the world, so it is essential that similar imagination and intelligence -- and courage --



be shown by our Government in meeting the results of the revolution of rising expectations at home.

This is not to say that measures taken by this Administration up to now have been without value. The nation was immeasurably strengthened in its understanding of the gravity of the constitutional issues by the action taken at Little Rock last September to uphold the sanctity of the orders of Federal courts. The Chief Executive's personal support of efforts to eliminate segregation in the armed services and on service installations has been beneficial, although pockets still remain which should be wiped out. The enactment of the 1957 Civil Rights Act with the active support of the Administration was a significant advance.



Valuable as these and other measures have been, they have not as yet clearly provided a planned and integral approach to the multitude of tough problems which must be solved along the way. It is in the hope that these essential objectives may thereby be promoted that we suggest and urge the adoption of the following program:

1. The President of the United States should declare in a nationwide pronouncement, prior to September, that the law will be vigorously upheld with the total resources at his command.
2. Much emphasis has been laid on the need for restoring



communication between white and colored Southerners who are troubled by a common fear of reaction. The President can well set the example in this matter by convoking a White House Conference of constructive leadership to discuss ways and means of complying peaceably with the Court's rulings.

3. Information, resources and advice of the appropriate government agencies addressed to the problems of integration should be made available to all officials and community groups seeking to work out a program of education and action.
4. The President should request both parties to lay aside partisanship so that the Congress can enact a civil rights bill which will include Part III originally in the 1957 bill, in order that constitutional rights other than voting rights may be enforced by the United States Attorney General. Lack of adequate and clear statutory authority has made the Federal Government a mere spectator in the disgraceful maneuverings at Little Rock.
5. We urge the President to direct the Department of Justice to give all legal assistance possible under the law,



including the filing of a brief as a friend of the court and appearance of counsel, in the appeal from the Lemly decision in the Little Rock case.

6. The President of the United States should direct the Department of Justice to act now to protect the right of citizens to register and vote. In the nine months since the enactment of the 1957 Civil Rights Act, overt acts have been committed against prospective Negro registrants in some areas and numerous complaints have been submitted to the Department, but, to date, not a single case has reached a court of law. Unless immediate action is undertaken, thousands of Negro citizens will be denied the right to cast a ballot in the 1958 elections.
7. The President should direct the Department of Justice to act under existing statutes in the wave of bombings of churches, synagogues, homes and community centers; also in the murderous brutality directed against Negro citizens in Dawson, Georgia, and other communities.
8. In order to counteract the deliberate hamstringing of the new Civil Rights Commission, the President should



recommend to the Congress the extension of its life for at least a full year beyond its present expiration date.

9. The President should make it clear both in statement and in act that he believes in the principle that federal money should not be used to underwrite segregation in violation of the federal constitutional rights of millions of Negro citizens; and that this principle should be applied whether in matters of federal aid to education, hospitals, housing, or any other grants-in-aid to state and local governments. In support of national policy, the Federal Government should finance continuation of public schools where state funds are withdrawn because of integration.



In addition to the enumerations above, Negro citizens are deeply concerned over the efforts to curb the appellate jurisdiction of the Supreme Court, particularly the restrictions proposed in H.R. 3, a bill, which is both anti-civil rights and anti-labor.

Widespread discrimination against Negroes in employment persists in industry, business and government and has been underscored by the general rise in unemployment. The problem is highlighted by repeated

failures of efforts to enact national fair employment legislation and by the demonstrated ineffectiveness of administrative directives.

The need continues for vigorous enforcement of the Federal policy of non-discrimination in government employment. The national government can set an example by removing the barriers which have limited the employment of Negro citizens in all U. S. installations abroad, including the foreign service.

These recommendations are made in the belief that tensions between citizens in our country, and the anxieties of citizens themselves, will be eased and eventually erased if a clear national policy and a program of implementation are established by the Chief Executive of the nation.



A. Philip Randolph

Lester B. Granger

Reverend Martin Luther King

Roy Wilkins

June 23, 1958

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