

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

November 29, 1955



MEMORANDUM TO: Mr. Maxwell Rabb

I served more than eight years as Field Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and during that period faced every manner of problem that comes within the realm of race relations. Therefore, 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 affecting 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.

There are visible indications 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 on the lips and in the minds of all Negroes is the injustice of the Till matter, 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 are 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