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JACK MARTIN
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October 7, 1957

Dear Senator Stennis:

I am much impressed by the earnestness of your telegram of October first. I sense, however, that you may be laboring under a misimpression as to the relationship of the President and the Executive Branch to events now unfolding in Little Rock and elsewhere throughout the South.

First, as to the mission of Federal soldiers in Little Rock, I emphasize that they are there not to enforce or to advance any governmental policy respecting integration, desegregation or segregation. They are there, simply, because the normal processes of law have been frustrated. Due to State use of force, first, to block Federal court orders, due next to State refusal to use troops to prevent mobs from blocking Federal court orders, and due finally to local inability to comply with Federal court orders because of mob violence unrestrained by State authorities, other than normal means had to be found to uphold the law. State and local law enforcement agencies being either unwilling or unable to uphold the law, it became imperatively necessary that the law be upheld by the Federal Government.

The alternative to supporting the law in such a situation is to acquiesce in anarchy, mob rule, and incipient rebellion. Such unthinkable consequences would be quite as disastrous for the South as for any other region. Ultimately, of course, such a course would destroy the Nation.

Your earnest plea for understanding and for adequate consultation with representative leaders of the South I have every sympathy for. Repeatedly I have stressed the same point of view in press conferences, and it was emphasized once again in my statement to the Nation a few nights ago in respect to the Little Rock situation.

CROSS CARD FOR STAFF SECRETARY