

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Following is a memorandum of conversation between President Kennedy and Governor George Wallace of Alabama aboard the helicopter between Muscle Shoals and Huntsville, Alabama, May 18, 1963:

The subject of Birmingham first came up after the helicopter had been up for 15 minutes. The President thanked Governor Wallace for having seen the Attorney General and Governor Wallace said he had been happy to see the Attorney General -- that they had talked for an hour and 22 minutes. He said he felt it was always helpful to have these discussions -- that he was happy the President had come to Alabama today.

The President asked Governor Wallace what the current situation was in Birmingham. Governor Wallace replied that his main interest was in maintaining law and order and that the situation was quiet. The President asked the Governor how many men he had in Birmingham. The Governor replied that counting game wardens, alcohol tax units, investigators and others he had some 600. He said with the city police and sheriffs office, etc., there was a total law enforcement force of some 1,000. He said he was confident that this was enough of a force to maintain law and order. He added that he had moved State troops into Birmingham at the request of city officials -- that he would remove them at any time the city officials asked him to. The President replied that the situation would remain tense in Birmingham as long as no progress was made. He said the same thing was true in a number of other cities throughout the country and that this situation was not peculiar to Birmingham. He said that progress had to be made in Birmingham to avoid future trouble. The Governor replied that he thought he could keep things under control in Birmingham and the President reiterated the fact that things would never be under control in Birmingham until some progress was made.

The President pointed to the City of Washington, D.C. as a city with problems, but at the same time not a city where the Negro

had been denied his rights. He said there were a number of things that could be done in Birmingham to achieve some progress. For example, the President said he could not understand why Negroes could not be hired to work in various downtown stores. He said that the very people who protested this action had Negroes serving their tables at home.

The Governor said the big problem in Birmingham was the influence of outside leadership. He particularly singled out Martin Luther King who he described as a faker. He said the vast majority of Negroes in Birmingham did not support King's leadership and "had behaved themselves very well during the recent trouble." (*The Governor said that the Reverend Martin Luther King and the Reverend Shuttlesworth vied with each other to see "who could go to bed with the most nigger women, and white and red women too. They ride around town in big cadillacs smoking expensive cigars.")

The President said that outside leadership would not be needed in a city which was making progress and he again stated that progress was absolutely necessary and that Birmingham was getting an absolutely impossible reputation throughout the country and the world. Birmingham could not afford for this to continue -- its industries would leave and the only way the problem would be solved would be through some progress on rights. The Governor again castigated Martin Luther King and said he thought he could maintain the situation in Birmingham.

The conversation ended with the Governor's assertion of his admiration for the President and his recollection of the fact that he had campaigned for the President in 1960.

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NOTE: This memorandum was shown to Senator Lester Hill and Congressman Robert Jones (with the exception of the sentence *), both of Alabama and both of whom heard the conversation, on the flight from Huntsville, Alabama to Andrews AFB on May 18, 1963 and who both agreed that the memorandum is an accurate representation of the conversation.

Pierre Salinger

PS/smv