

5-20-1961

**Correspondence, Robert F. Kennedy, John Patterson, John C.  
Stennis, May 20-22, 1961**

United States. Attorney-General

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Office of the Attorney General  
Washington, D. C.

May 22, 1961

Honorable John Cornelius Stennis  
United States Senate  
Washington 25, D. C.

Dear Senator:

I am enclosing a copy of the telegram which I sent to Governor Patterson of Alabama on Saturday, May 20, informing him of the reasons why it was necessary to send United States deputy marshals to Montgomery to maintain peace and order and protect interstate travel and commerce.

The action was taken pursuant to Title 10, USC Section 333 which provides that:

"The President, by using the militia or the armed forces, or both or by any other means, shall take such measures as he considers necessary to suppress, in a State, any insurrection, domestic violence, unlawful combination . . . ."

Very sincerely yours,

Robert F. Kennedy



# Department of Justice

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
SATURDAY, MAY 20, 1961

Following is the text of the telegram which Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy sent to Governor Patterson of Alabama:

Governor John Patterson  
Montgomery, Alabama

As you know, since early this last week I have been deeply concerned about the situation in Alabama. From my conversation with you on Monday and numerous conversations that I and my associates here had with your aides, you have been aware of the concern with which we have regarded this very explosive situation. Since the destruction of the bus on Sunday and the interference of interstate travel you have been made aware of our clear responsibility in this area. The President himself when he was unable to reach you Friday made this clear to the Lt. Governor and pointed out that the Federal Government has the responsibility to guarantee safe passage in interstate commerce and that free travel had not been possible for five days in Alabama. The President hoped that the government of Alabama would restore the situation without the need for action by Federal Authorities.

You then requested that the President send a personal representative to discuss the matter with you. As you know, Mr. Seigenthaler of this office met with you last evening and in your presence talked to me on the telephone. He told me that you wanted to assure the President and the Federal Government that you had the will, the force, the men, and the equipment to fully protect everyone in Alabama.

Mr. Seigenthaler assured you that the Federal Government was willing to provide marshals and any other assistance in order to assure that interstate commerce was unimpeded. You stated that this was unnecessary and that you and the local authorities would be completely able to handle every contingency. You suggested that we notify the Greyhound Bus Company that this guarantee had been given. It was based on this assurance of safe conduct that the students boarded the bus in Birmingham on their trip to Montgomery. These students boarded the bus this morning. They arrived in Montgomery and were attacked and beaten by a mob. Prior to their arrival we took the additional precautionary step of having the FBI notify the police department that these students were coming and asked the police to take all necessary steps for their protection. The F.B.I. was informed and in turn notified us that all necessary steps had been taken and that no action on our part was necessary. As a matter of fact, no police were present. However, an armed mob was. Several of the travelers were severely

beaten. The President's personal representative, Mr. Seigenthaler, who attempted to rescue a young white girl, who was being attacked by the mob, was knocked to the ground and left unconscious in the street.

Once again I have tried to reach you by telephone to discuss this matter with you. I was informed that you were out of town and no one knew when you would return or where you were. Therefore, although I strongly believe that law enforcement matters should be handled by local authorities whenever possible, now not being even able to reach you to learn what steps you intend to take we have no alternative but to order the following action:

1) I am asking the United States Court in Montgomery to enjoin the Ku Klux Klan, the National States Rights Party, certain individuals and all persons acting in concert with them, from interfering with peaceful interstate travel by buses.

2) I am arranging for the FBI to send in an extra team to intensify its investigation of the incident in Montgomery and the other events this past week in which the federal government has jurisdiction.

3) I am also arranging for United States officers to begin to assist state and local authorities in the protection of persons and property and vehicles in Alabama.

Mr. Byron White, the Deputy Attorney General, will be in charge and will be in touch with your office as well as the local authorities.

I trust we will have your cooperation and the cooperation of local authorities.

Robert F. Kennedy