

3-12-1965

Senator Stennis Civil Rights Correspondence B03F43L05

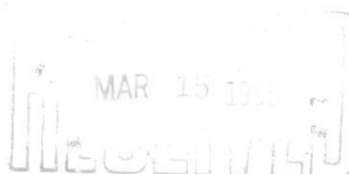
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cc: Senator James O. Eastland
Senator John C. Stennis ✓



JOHN STENNIS

Handwritten signature of John Stennis

██████████
Hickory Flat, Mississippi

March 12, 1965

The President
The White House
Washington, D. C.

Mr. President:

I have never before attempted to write to a President of the United States. I am also sure you will never see this letter; however, I feel I must write you and hope that there might be a chance to convey to you some thoughts from an average white Mississippian.

I am forty-six years old, married, and have two sons. I was born in Mississippi, have lived here my entire life. I am a farmer and a businessman. I am not a segregationist.

You have had numerous meetings with negro civil rights leaders; you are meeting today with Northern clergymen about the situation in the South; but, to my knowledge, you have never given audience to an average white citizen from the South.

I would be the first to admit discrimination against the colored people in the South. We should hang our heads in shame, and a vast number of citizens of Mississippi are doing that very thing. After the passage of the Civil Rights Law, racial barriers all over our state dropped almost immediately. Voter registration is the last to fall into line but that is being accomplished daily. It is almost unbelievable that so vast a change could take place so quickly. Yet, in almost all the news media all you hear about Mississippi is bad. Could not someone in government recognize the movement that is taking place in Mississippi and say something good for a change? Sometimes a little recognition and encouragement will accomplish wonders. The responsible people in Mississippi are speaking out every day. Even our Governor, whom I did not support because of his segregationist views, is speaking out for compliance with the law. A little recognition of the movement that is taking place, by our government leaders, would accomplish much, I believe.

The President

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March 12, 1965

We have all fallen short in some respects I am sure. My business travels have carried me to many cities and plants in the North and East. In every one that I have visited I have seen discrimination, exactly as we have it in the South. Why can't we realize this? Why are we so ready to criticize our brother before we have "walked in his moccasins for a mile". We could do well to remember, "He who is without sin cast the first stone".

As I have said, we in the South realize we have fallen far short, we beg for more help, not more damnation.

As I listened to Mr. Katzenbach last night, I was shocked at his reply to the question, "Have you or any of your staff talked to Governor Wallace about the situation in Selma?". His reply, "No." Why? Maybe Governor Wallace would not discuss the situation. On the other hand, he might. At any rate, I think the Attorney General has not fulfilled his duty until he tries.

We have a Civil Rights Law that has worked far beyond anyone's expectations, I think, so why does Dr. King feel it necessary to go to the streets and create more discontent, hate, and murder? Could the Federal Government discourage these marches so the laws could have a chance to work? Would the Attorney General not have more time to enforce voter registration laws? If more laws are needed, can our Congress and Justice Department see that these laws are introduced and enacted. Is there not some way to discourage the creation of these conditions that lead to unnecessary bloodshed?

I hasten to apologize for this rambling, meaningless letter, but I do feel there is a voice "crying in the wilderness" that is not being heard. That voice is the average white Southerner. Maybe sometime you can find time to invite one of them to the White House to personally give you their thinking.

Respectfully yours,



ECM/bs