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## OUR CONSCIOUS CRIES OUT: LBJ AND THE WATTS REBELLION

### DESCRIPTION

Five days after the signing of the Voting Rights Act, Marquette Frye was arrested in Central Los Angeles. The resulting racial unrest left buildings destroyed and whole city blocks burned. President Johnson continues to grapple with the role of the federal government in response to continued racial unrest, despite the recent landmark civil rights legislation. This presentation will utilize primary sources to navigate the tumultuous events of the Watts Rebellion.

### PRIMARY SOURCES FROM PRESENTATION

#### August 6, 1965 | Voting Rights Act signed into law

LBJ Presidential Library

[http://www.lbjlibrary.net/assets/lbj\\_tools/photolab/photos/1/large/a1030-17a.tif](http://www.lbjlibrary.net/assets/lbj_tools/photolab/photos/1/large/a1030-17a.tif)

#### August 1965 | Local News Coverage of Watts

Los Angeles Times

<https://documents.latimes.com/1965-watts-riots/>

#### August 14, 1965 | Newsreel: Aftermath of Violence in Los Angeles

UCLA Film & Television Archive

Hearst Metrotone News Collection

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2oX9GcbDzyU&list=PLVTStOGUY\\_Ufl2RR4m0PmisKQtBsKYcV-](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2oX9GcbDzyU&list=PLVTStOGUY_Ufl2RR4m0PmisKQtBsKYcV-)

#### August 14, 1965 | President Johnson and Joseph Califano Telephone Conversation

LBJ Presidential Library

<https://www.discoverlbj.org/item/tel-08538>

Transcript - Clip #1 (Begins at about 1:30)

**Johnson:** *I'm not going to send anybody out there that State doesn't ask for. I don't want to completely admit that city government, state government, and county government is impotent in this country and that I'm a dictator. And if the governor of the state asks me and says, as Wallace did, says, "I'm financially unable," or "I have no power to do this," then I'll*

move in two minutes.

**Califano:** Yes, sir.

**Johnson:** Now, if General Hill says that he's got to have this or that, as they usually do—they usually throw it all over at the federal government. They couldn't move a constable across town, but I'd like for them to do what they can on their own, but what they can't, why, then we'll be glad to do it. But I want to see what I'm approving and rejecting.

Transcript Clip #2 (Begins about 3:45)

**Johnson:** Be sure that they're utilizing all the facilities they have, and if they are using all of their own facilities and they have no other way to do it and they request it of us, then it's approved right now. You just get it to me, and I'll initial it so damn quick it'll make your head swim.

**Califano:** Yes, sir. And that—and we have—General Abrams is doing that with everyone. He has shown them, for example, in their early requests for aircraft to help lift their troops, that they had the ability to do it themselves, and they did it themselves.

**Johnson:** That's what I was afraid of. I told Jack, "They're going to ask us to do everything. I found that out after 35 years. And we want to do what we have to, but we don't want to just usurp their power."

### August 15, 1965 | Statement by the President

University of California Santa Barbara

The American Presidency Project

<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-the-president-following-the-restoration-order-los-angeles>

### August 19, 1965 | Dr. King visits Los Angeles

King Institute, Stanford University

Los Angeles Times

<https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/watts-rebellion-los-angeles>

<https://graphics.latimes.com/watts-photos/>

### August 20, 1965 | Lee White Memo to LBJ

LBJ Presidential Library

<https://www.discoverlbj.org/item/aides-white-b06-f07>

(See p. 19-20)

### August 20, 1965 | Dr. King and LBJ Telephone Conversation

**Johnson:** *[speaking over King] But I wanted you to know I'd said that. Pardon me for interrupting. Go ahead.*

**King:** *That's all right. But in my meeting with Police Chief Parker and Mr. Yorty—Mayor Yorty—I just felt that they are absolutely insensitive to the problem and to the needs, to really cure the situation. Now, Mr. Parker is a very rude man—we just couldn't get anywhere with him—but I just don't see a willingness even on the part of the mayor to grant just a few concessions to make—to bring about a new sense of hope and [unclear]. Now, what is frightening about it is that you hear all of these tones of violence. The people out there in the Watts area, they'd assumed the National Guard indeed were going back in. The minute that happens there will be retaliation in the White community this time. Last time there was not, which was wonderful. But the people have bought up guns, and Chief Parker went on television the other day, they need to do an anti-riot crew, and all of that. So that I'm fearful that if something isn't done to give a new sense of hope to the people in that area—and they are poverty-stricken—that a full-scale race war can develop here. And I'm concerned about it, naturally, because I know that violence—a riot at the end of the day wouldn't—doesn't help.*

**Johnson:** *That's right. Now, what should we do about it? What's your recommendation?*

**King:** *Well, the problem is I think that poverty—if they could get, in the next few days, this poverty program going in Los Angeles, I believe that it would help a great deal.*

**Johnson:** *I'll get him over here in the morning. We'll get at it. Where are you going to be?*

**King:** *I'll be in Atlanta in the morning.*

**Johnson:** *All right. We'll call you back. Lee [C. White] will call you, or I'll call you if I have time, and we'll explore it. Is that the net of what you're recommending?*

**King:** *That's right. I think this would be greatly—this would help greatly.*

## **August 25, 1965 | Justice Department Task Force Arrives in Los Angeles**

LBJ Presidential Library

<https://www.discoverlbj.org/item/tfreports-b10-f7>

(See p. 16 for Community Attitudes section)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### **Office files of Joseph Califano**

LBJ Presidential Library

<https://www.discoverlbj.org/item/aides-califano-b058-f02>

### **Transcript of Joe Califano Oral History**

LBJ Presidential Library

<https://www.discoverlbj.org/item/oh-califanoj-19690821-4-11-58>

<https://www.discoverlbj.org/item/oh-califanoj-19870923-10-11-64>

### **Office files of Lee White**

LBJ Presidential Library

<https://www.discoverlbj.org/item/aides-white-b06-f07>

### **Transcript of Lee White Oral History**

LBJ Presidential Library

<https://www.discoverlbj.org/item/oh-whitel-19710302-3-79-111>

### **Transcript of Ramsey Clark Oral History**

LBJ Presidential Library

<https://www.discoverlbj.org/item/oh-clarkr-19690321-3-79-35>

### **President Johnson's Remarks at the White House Conference on Equal Employment Opportunities**

University of California Santa Barbara

The American Presidency Project

<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-white-house-conference-equal-employment-opportunities>

### **President Johnson's Remarks at the signing of the Public Works and Economic Development Act**

University of California Santa Barbara

The American Presidency Project

<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-signing-the-public-works-and-economic-development-act>

### **Dr. King's Essay in the Saturday Review**

King, M.L. "Beyond the Los Angeles Riots: Next Step, The North," *Saturday Review* (13 November 1965): 33–35; 105.



**Dr. King Arrives in Los Angeles**

UCLA Film and Television Archive

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=diLC4hbJVF4>

**Watts 50th Anniversary Article**

Los Angeles Times

<https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-watts-riots-explainer-20150715-htmlstory.html>

**Out of Long-Gone Rubble of The Watts Riots, Scars and Signs of Healing**

NPR All Things Considered

<https://www.npr.org/2015/08/08/430753725/50-years-after-race-riots-watts-still-shows-signs-of-scars-and-healing>

**Walter Mosely: Watts Riots 'Paved the Way for a lot of Change'**

NPR Code Switch

<https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2015/08/14/432084376/walter-mosley-watts-riots-paved-the-way-for-a-lot-of-change>

# THE VANTAGE POINT

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*Perspectives of the Presidency*  
1963–1969

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LYNDON  
BAINES  
JOHNSON

HOLT, RINEHART AND WINSTON  
New York    Chicago    San Francisco

issue we must rise with the occasion. That calls for cloture and for the enactment of a civil rights bill.

With this speech, Dirksen sounded the death knell for the Southern strategy of filibuster. For the first time in history the Senate voted cloture on a civil rights bill. With all one hundred Senators present and voting, we needed 67 votes for the two-thirds rule to obtain cloture. We got four more than that. The final tally was 71 to 29.

With cloture, the battle was over. The bill was assured of passage.

In the wake of defeat the Southerners' proposed amendments became gestures only, overwhelmingly voted down one by one on the Senate floor. Three weeks later the Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the most sweeping civil rights measure enacted in the twentieth century.

I signed the bill in the East Room of the White House. My thoughts went back to the afternoon a decade before when there was absolutely nothing I could say to Gene Williams, or to any black man, or to myself. That had been the day I first realized the sad truth: that to the extent Negroes were imprisoned, so was I. On this day, July 2, 1964, I knew the positive side of that same truth: that to the extent Negroes were free, really free, so was I. And so was my country.

Many people felt we should rest after the victory of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, take it easy on Congress, and leave some breathing space for the bureaucracy and the nation. But there was no time to rest. Tensions in the South were still running high. That same summer three civil rights workers were brutally murdered in Mississippi. Churches were bombed and lives were threatened. In the North a different set of tensions exploded—the tensions of poverty, squalor, unemployment, and inadequate health care. Riots broke out and continued for four days in Harlem late in July, followed by similar disturbances in four other Northern cities.

The first of several long, hot summers had begun.

The theme of "law and order" became a major thrust of Senator Goldwater's campaign for the Presidency in 1964. I shared the growing concern about violence, but I believed the real danger, far more profound than violence and far more perilous, was the increasing alienation of the black citizens from American society. Our representative system was based on the joint premise that all citizens would be responsible under the law and that the law would be responsive to the needs of all citizens. But in the field of human rights a significant number of citizens had not been fully served by our system. I feared that as long as these citizens were alienated from the *rights* of the American system, they would continue to consider themselves outside the *obligations* of that system. I tried to state this position as fully as I could in the Presidential campaign. I wanted a mandate to move forward, not simply a sanction for the status quo.

On November 3, 1964, the American voters gave me that mandate. I moved to use it quickly. I directed Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach \* to begin the complicated task of drafting the next civil rights bill—legislation to secure, once and for all, equal voting rights. In many ways I believed this act would be even more critical than the previous one. Once the black man's voice could be translated into ballots, many other breakthroughs would follow, and they would follow as a consequence of the black man's own legitimate power as an American citizen, not as a gift from the white man.

I discussed this legislation several times early in 1965 with Roy Wilkins, Executive Director of the NAACP; Martin Luther King, Jr., leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; Whitney Young, Jr., Executive Director of the National Urban League; Clarence Mitchell, Director of the Washington Bureau of the NAACP; A. Philip Randolph, and others. We all knew that the prospects for congressional passage were unpromising, but we decided to go ahead. I would work within the federal government; the black leadership would take their cause directly to the people.

The capstone of their campaign was a fifty-four-mile march through Alabama from Selma to Montgomery. Two abreast, blacks and whites together, the marchers walked, singing the words of an old Baptist hymn:

We shall stand together, we shall stand together,  
We shall stand together—now.  
Oh, deep in my heart I do believe  
We shall overcome someday.

The singing came to an abrupt end early in the evening of March 7, when the marchers reached the Edmund Pettus Bridge at the southern edge of Selma and were confronted by Sheriff Jim Clark and a mounted posse. The sheriff ordered the marchers to turn around. They knew their rights and refused. The Alabama state troopers took matters into their own hands. With nightsticks, bullwhips, and billy clubs, they scattered the ranks of the marchers. More than fifty men and women were severely injured. The march was over.

But the struggle had just begun. Several nights later Lady Bird and I were hosting a congressional reception in the East Room of the White House. The reception was several hours old when one of my aides brought me an urgent note. James Reeb, a white Unitarian minister from Boston, had been clubbed to death in Selma by a band of four white men, to the shouts of "Hey, nigger lover."

We excused ourselves and went upstairs to call Mrs. Reeb. No matter what I could find to say to her, I had no answer to the one question that

\* Katzenbach, who succeeded Robert Kennedy, became Acting Attorney General on September 3, 1964, and Attorney General on February 13, 1965.



kept turning over and over in my mind: How many Jim Reeb's will die before our country is truly free?

As I watched the reruns of the Selma confrontation on television, I felt a deep outrage. I believed that my feelings were shared by millions of Americans throughout the country, North and South, but I knew that it would probably not take long for these aroused emotions to melt away. It was important to move at once if we were to achieve anything permanent from this transitory mood. It was equally important that we move in the right direction.

The most obvious step, and the one most passionately desired by citizens in the North who supported equal rights for the Negro, was to send federal troops to Alabama. I understood this desire and the deep concern that motivated it. But I knew that a hasty display of federal force at this time could destroy whatever possibilities existed for the passage of voting rights legislation. Such action would play into the hands of those looking for a states' rights martyr in Governor Wallace. Sending federal troops would turn the growing compassion of the Southern moderates into defensive resistance, and would resurrect the bitterness between North and South. We had to have a real victory for the black people, not a psychological victory for the North. I directed Justice Department officials to work night and day to loosen the tangled cords of constitutional and legal questions that were still knotted from the early days of our proposed voting rights bill.

Meanwhile, there was a storm of public protest to contend with. In front of the White House scores of demonstrators marched up and down with placards: "LBJ, just you wait . . . see what happens in '68" . . . "LBJ, open your eyes, see the sickness of the South, see the horrors of your homeland." Inside the East Wing a group of demonstrators who had joined a regular White House tour conducted a sit-in. Everywhere I looked I was being denounced for my "unbelievable lack of action." Across the nation hundreds of sympathy marches and sit-ins were mobilized.

Once again my Southern heritage was thrown in my face. I was hurt, deeply hurt. But I was determined not to be shoved into hasty action. If only there were some way to assure protection for the marchers without the drama of using federal troops; if only the State of Alabama would exercise its state's right and assume its constitutional obligation.

My hopes were answered on Friday, March 12, when Governor Wallace wired me requesting a special meeting to discuss the situation in Selma. I replied immediately that I would be "available at any time." An appointment was set for twelve noon the next day. We sat together in the Oval Office. I kept my eyes directly on the Governor's face the entire time. I saw a nervous, aggressive man; a rough, shrewd politician who had managed to touch the deepest chords of pride as well as prejudice among his people.

It was to his pride as an Alabama patriot that I appealed when I asked the Governor to assure me that he would let the marchers proceed in peace and would provide adequate troops to insure the right of peaceful assembly. The Governor's first response was an automatic one. He said the only problems in Alabama were the troublesome demonstrators themselves. They were the ones who were threatening the lives and safety of the people; they were the ones who were defying law and order.

I told him that I believed the only useful way to handle the demonstrators was to respond to their grievances. "The Negro citizens of Alabama who have been systematically denied the right to register and vote have to be given the opportunity to direct national attention to their plight," I said.

The Governor turned then to the question of troops. In his view, the state held the responsibility to maintain law and order. I agreed with him at once and told him that was precisely my point. But I made it clear that I intended no such misunderstanding to occur as that which arose between Governor Orval Faubus of Arkansas and President Eisenhower during the 1957 Little Rock episode, when the Governor actually used the National Guard to prevent integration. I told him I had seven hundred troops on alert. If the state and local authorities were unwilling or unable to function, I would not hesitate one moment to send in federal troops.

The Governor said he understood, and we parted in a mood of cordiality. In fact, the Governor was later reported to have said: "If I hadn't left when I did, he'd have had me coming out *for* civil rights."

The meeting with Wallace proved to be the critical turning point in the voting rights struggle. Several days later I received word from the Governor that the State of Alabama was unable to bear the financial burdens of mobilizing the National Guard. The state could not protect the marchers on its own. It needed federal assistance. I gave such assistance immediately. I signed an Executive order federalizing the Alabama National Guard.

So the troops went in after all. They went in by order of the President, because the Governor said Alabama couldn't afford them financially. But they were not intruders forcing their way in; they were citizens of Alabama. That made all the difference in the world.

By Sunday morning, March 14, the Justice Department had completed most of its work on the draft of the voting rights bill. The thorny questions of federal power had been resolved. We had decided that federal registrars and trigger provisions \* would be absolutely essential to secure the black man's voting rights. But one question remained: What was the best way to transmit the message to the Congress—in person or in writing?

I asked the bipartisan leadership of the Congress to meet with me that

\* Specific criteria under which the federal government would send in registrars.

Sunday evening at 5 P.M. The members present included Senators Mansfield, Dirksen, and Kuchel and Representatives McCormack, Albert, Boggs, and William McCulloch of Ohio. I went over the main provisions of the voting rights bill as it was then drafted and asked for their best judgment in approaching the Congress.

Senator Mansfield spoke first. He suggested that I send the bill up Tuesday afternoon. He did not think that I should make a public presentation. Senator Dirksen agreed. He stressed the need to avoid panic. "This is a deliberate government. Don't let these people say we scared him into it. Don't circumvent the Congress."

I understood their hesitation. It is sometimes risky for the President to "go to the people" in support of a bill. If Congress does not support the public appeal, the move can completely backfire. Yet in this case I felt I had to reassure the people that we were moving as far and as fast as we could. I knew this reassurance would not be provided by the cold words of a written message. But if my congressional leaders were against it, I certainly had to weigh their counsel.

At that point Speaker McCormack said: "I disagree. I strongly recommend that the President go to the Congress and present the bill to a Joint Session. I suggest that he tell the Congress and the entire nation about the bill. Such a speech would show bipartisanship . . . it would show the world that action is being taken."

He spoke with intense conviction. His words, and the decades of experience behind them, had an immediate impact on the rest of the leadership. I could see the tide beginning to shift. Majority Leader Albert supported the Speaker. "I agree," he said. "I don't think your coming before the Congress would be a sign of panic. I think it would help."

By the end of the meeting the leadership was unanimous in recommending that I address the Congress before a Joint Session at 9 P.M. the next evening, March 15. The meeting adjourned at 6:30 P.M. Later that evening I assembled some of my key staff men to help prepare the message. A Presidential speech is rarely a private product. The pressures of the office do not afford the luxury of such personal handicraft. But this time, as much as humanly possible, I wanted to reach the American people in my own words.

I sat with my staff for several hours. I described the general outline of what I wanted to say. I wanted to use every ounce of moral persuasion the Presidency held. I wanted no hedging, no equivocation. And I wanted to talk from my own heart, from my own experience.

Between midnight and dawn these loose thoughts were translated into sentences for the first draft of the speech. I received that draft shortly after awakening. I penciled in changes and rewrote sections. The draft went back to the speechwriters. Several hours later a new draft came back. I made

additional changes. And so it went, back and forth, right up to the final moments.

I had to be at the podium in the House Chamber at 9 P.M., but at 8 P.M. I was still writing about my experiences in a Cotulla, Texas, schoolroom. The speech still had to be typed and put on the teleprompter. We never made it with the teleprompter. I had to deliver most of the speech from a rough copy lying on the rostrum.

As I stood before the assembled Chamber, the lights were blinding. I began slowly:

I speak tonight for the dignity of man and the destiny of democracy. . . . At times history and fate meet at a single time in a single place to shape a turning point in man's unending search for freedom. So it was at Lexington and Concord. So it was a century ago at Appomattox. So it was last week in Selma, Alabama.

I could feel the tension in the Chamber. I could hear the emotion in the echoes of my own words. I tried to speed up a little.

There is no constitutional issue here. The command of the Constitution is plain. There is no moral issue. It is wrong—deadly wrong—to deny any of your fellow Americans the right to vote in this country. There is no issue of states' rights or national rights. There is only the struggle for human rights. . . . This time, on this issue, there must be no delay, no hesitation, and no compromise with our purpose.

I looked up to the Presidential box. I could barely distinguish the faces of Lady Bird and our daughter Lynda. But I felt them with me. Then I looked straight ahead in the Chamber at my Southern friends. I knew that most of them were not with me. I went on:

But even if we pass this bill, the battle will not be over. What happened in Selma is part of a far larger movement which reaches into every section and state of America. It is the effort of American Negroes to secure for themselves the full blessings of American life.

I paused for breath. In that fleeting moment my thoughts turned to the picket lines in Birmingham, the sit-ins in North Carolina, the marches in Selma. A picture rose before my eyes—a picture of blacks and whites marching together, side by side, chanting and singing the anthem of the civil rights movement.

I raised my arms.

Their cause must be our cause too. Because it is not just Negroes, but really it is all of us who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice. And . . . we . . . shall . . . overcome.

For a few seconds the entire Chamber was quiet. Then the applause started and kept coming. One by one the Representatives and Senators stood up. They were joined by the Cabinet, the Justices, and the Ambassadors.



sadors. Soon most of the Chamber was on its feet with a shouting ovation that I shall never forget as long as I live.

I remember the ride home from the Capitol that night. As we circled the reflecting pool, I looked toward the Lincoln Memorial. There had always been something haunting for me in that statue of Lincoln—so life-like and so clear-cut a reminder of the persistent gap between our promises and our deeds. Somehow that night Lincoln's hopes for America seemed much closer.

Four months later our immediate goal was realized. On August 6 I returned to the Capitol to sign the Voting Rights Act of 1965. I remembered the words Reverend King had spoken when his marchers finally reached Montgomery: "We are on the move now. . . . Selma has become a shining monument in the conscience of man."

And I said in return: "So we will move step by step—often painfully, but I think with clear vision—along the path toward American freedom." I spoke these words in the rotunda of the Capitol, directly in front of another statue of Abraham Lincoln.\*

With the passage of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965 the barriers of freedom began tumbling down. At long last the legal rights of American citizens—the right to vote, to hold a job, to enter a public place, to go to school—were given concrete protection.

But these legislative victories served to illuminate the full dimensions of the American dilemma. No matter how hard we tried to make up for the deprivation of the past and no matter how well we thought we knew the black man, the time would come when we would be forced to realize the measure of his bitterness. And the time would come when we would realize that legislative guarantees were not enough. I talked about this in a commencement speech at Howard University on June 4, 1965:

You do not wipe away the scars of centuries by saying: Now you are free to go where you want and do as you desire and choose the leaders you please. You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him to the starting line of a race, and then say you are free to compete with all the others, and still just believe that you have been completely fair. Thus it is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates. This is the next and the more profound stage of the battle for civil rights. We seek not just freedom but opportunity. We seek not just legal equity but human ability, not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result.

\* It had once been traditional for Presidents to sign legislation at the Capitol. To dramatize the importance we attached to this bill—and to give full measure to the Congress—I revived the custom on this occasion, the first President to do so in more than a quarter of a century.

Change, real change, was on the horizon—close enough to ignite hope but far enough away to increase frustration. For all the successes of the 1960s, Negroes still were excluded from real equality. Jim Crow was on his way out in the South, but in many ways the Northern style of discrimination—subtle, unpublicized, and deep-rooted—was even tougher to break. All too often the same Northern whites who were perfectly willing to grant the Negro his formal rights as a citizen were unwilling or unable to grant the social acceptance and compassion that would make the formal rights meaningful.

The long history of Negro-white relations had entered a new and more bewildering stage. New problems of racial discrimination came to the forefront: the problems of poverty, slums, inadequate schooling, unemployment, delinquency, and substandard housing. These problems could not be solved entirely by laws, crusades, or marches.

No longer could the struggle for justice be regarded as a peculiarly Southern problem. Nor could it be regarded as a problem to be solved entirely by improved attitudes in the white community. The effect on the black man of centuries of discrimination had become all too visible in the form of apathy, hatred, anger, and violence. The problems at this stage could not be solved by goodwill and compassion; they required large expenditures of public funds.

We were beset by contradictions—movement and progress alongside stalemate and retrogression. Nowhere were these contradictions experienced more deeply than in the black community, where hopes aroused by the early victories were bright but hostilities caused by the persistent gap between promise and fulfillment were deep. It was a volatile mixture.

A new mood began to develop in the black community, symbolized by the "black power" slogan. When asked about black power in 1966, I responded: "I am not interested in black power or white power. What I am concerned with is democratic power, with a small *d*." As I look back now, that answer seems totally insufficient. It is easy for a white man to say he is "not interested in black power or white power." Black power had a different meaning to the black man, who until recently had had to seek the white world's approval and for whom success had come largely on white people's terms. To such a man, black power meant a great deal in areas that mattered the most—dignity, pride, and self-awareness.

As the mask of black submission began to fall, the countless years of suppressed anger exploded outward. The withering of hope, the failure to change the dismal conditions of life, and the complex tangle of attitudes, issues, beliefs, and circumstances all led to the tragic phenomena known as "the riots"—"the long, hot summers."

Rioting in Detroit provided one of the worst instances—so bad, in fact, that the events of July 24–28, 1967, will remain forever etched in my

memory. The phone rang at 3 A.M. on the morning of July 24. Attorney General Ramsey Clark \* was on the wire.

"Mr. President," he said, "Governor Romney has just called me at home. The situation in Detroit looks bad. There are almost eighty fires unattended. There is extensive looting. The Governor thinks he might need federal assistance. I suggest we put the Army on alert just in case the troops are needed."

I promptly agreed and authorized the Attorney General to tell Army Secretary Stanley Resor to notify his men at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

"Anything more?" I asked.

"No, sir. Not now," the Attorney General replied. "I'll be leaving for my office shortly and will keep in touch with you from there."

The Attorney General talked with Governor Romney four times more during the night, but no decision was reached on the question of federal troops. Finally, at 8:55 A.M., Governor Romney called him to read a statement "recommending" the use of federal troops. Clark carefully explained that under the Constitution and under federal statutes it would be necessary for the Governor to "request" the use of federal troops, to specify that the city was in a state of insurrection or serious domestic violence, and to certify that such violence could not be brought under control by combined state and local resources. The Governor said he understood and would have the proper statement drafted as soon as possible.

The reasons for such elaborate certification are deeply embedded in our constitutional history. Our forefathers wanted to prevent the abuse of federal authority. In the course of nearly two hundred years, Presidents have followed that counsel of restraint. Federal troops have been used only fifteen times in our history to settle domestic crises.

The Governor's telegram reached the White House at 10:56 A.M. He requested troops but failed to certify that the disturbances amounted to a state of insurrection or a condition of domestic violence that could not be suppressed locally. His request, in short, did not meet constitutional requirements. Later that morning Governor Romney said he was not yet prepared to state that there was a condition of insurrection or domestic violence, because he had been told that such a statement might result in the voiding of insurance policies within the state.

Without this certification, a President cannot properly deploy troops to a specified city or state. He can, however, order troops from one military base to another. I used this authority to airlift troops from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and Fort Campbell, Kentucky, to Selfridge Air Force Base in Michigan. Since the movement of federal troops is a time-consuming process, I wanted to be in a position to use the forces promptly should conditions of insurrection or domestic violence be established.

\* Clark succeeded Nicholas Katzenbach as Attorney General on March 10, 1967.

With troops on their way to Selfridge, I decided to send a trusted observer to Detroit to confer with Governor Romney. In the emotional heat of a crisis incidents are sometimes exaggerated. Rumors spread wildly. In such a situation a President needs the most objective assessment of the disturbance he can obtain.

I thought immediately of Cy Vance. He was a veteran of every major civil disturbance from Oxford, Mississippi, on. At the time of the Detroit riots Vance was suffering from an extremely painful back condition. He could not even tie his shoelaces. And he had just returned from West Virginia, where he had buried his mother. A lesser man would have felt that he had every reason to say "no," and I would have understood completely. But Vance is one of that rare breed who puts service to his country above concern for himself. Within two hours he was on a plane headed for Detroit.

I immediately called Governor Romney to tell him that Vance would be my representative in Detroit, that he was on the way, and that I would await their joint assessment of the situation. Vance met with Governor Romney shortly after he arrived. At 5 P.M. they left together for a personal tour of the riot area. Vance reported his findings directly to me:

A few fires are still burning but they are now under control. There are large areas of the city with only an occasional broken window. There is no lawlessness in the downtown business area. The situation is much quieter than the preceding day. The incident rate is down one-third; the number of National Guard on the street is up three times, and the full local contingent is not yet deployed. There are still a substantial number of troops waiting for instructions. There is a sharp division among community leaders over the question of federal troops. Representative Diggs favors deployment; Representative Conyers \* does not, fearing that it might inflame rather than quell the situation. I have reviewed the evidence with General [John] Throckmorton, Commander of Task Force, Detroit, and the entire staff and we have concluded unanimously that there is an insufficient basis at this time to justify deployment of federal troops.

One hour later Governor Romney held a press conference which seemed to confirm Vance's report. The Governor reported to the press:

The situation is hopeful. The community is better organized. There are three times the number of National Guard tonight as last night. Last night we were scrambling. There is a rising desire of the people to see this thing ended. I am very hopeful we'll be able to lift the bans and let the people go back to work. There is reason to hope.

But as darkness settled in, our hopes were shattered. The incident rate of violence was rising sharply. Vance's reports sounded increasingly grim.

\* Charles C. Diggs, Jr., and John Conyers, Jr., Negro Congressmen from Detroit.

I went to my office to meet with Bob McNamara, General Harold K. Johnson, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, Secretary of the Army Stanley Resor, and Attorney General Ramsey Clark. New and discouraging reports came in by the minute. We took turns reading the ticker tapes. The atmosphere was heavy with tension and concern. We discussed the problems of the coming summer, aware that we did not know where violence might strike next. Director Hoover was concerned: "They have lost all control in Detroit. Harlem may break loose within thirty minutes. They plan to tear it to pieces."

My thoughts were sharply interrupted by Cy Vance's voice on the White House speaker phone from Detroit: "The situation is continuing to deteriorate. There are twelve hundred persons now being detained in felony court. Reports of incidents are increasing throughout the area. Conditions are worse than ever; I am ready now to recommend the deployment of federal troops. I believe that you should sign the Executive order to federalize the Michigan National Guard. I urge this action."

"Is there any doubt in anyone's mind, including the Governor's, that the National Guard should be federalized and the United States forces sent in?" I asked.

"No, sir, there is no doubt in the Governor's mind or anyone else's."

"What is the legal situation?"

"At this time, the Governor has already declared a state of emergency. All the available police and National Guard have been committed and I have determined that the local law enforcement agencies cannot control the situation. All of this is on its way in writing."

The final moment of decision had come. I knew what I had to do, but I could not erase from my mind the awful prospect of American soldiers possibly having to shoot American citizens. The thought of blood being spilled in the streets of Detroit was like a nightmare. I could imagine the inflammatory photographs appearing within hours on television and on the front pages of newspapers around the world.

I turned my attention back to Cy Vance. "We will follow your recommendations on this matter," I said. "I will sign the Executive order and proclamation at once."

In those final moments I wanted to guarantee that every precaution would be taken to prevent unnecessary use of firepower. I talked with Lieutenant General John Throckmorton, Commander of the 18th Airborne Corps, about the ground rules of engagement. He assured me that his men would be ordered to use minimum force and that individuals or private property would be searched only if deemed necessary to the accomplishment of the mission.

I asked Vance to set up loudspeakers throughout the area to make a last-minute appeal to the people on the streets before the troops arrived.

"I want you to tell them that federal troops are committed to come if necessary . . . ask them to cease and desist . . . ask them to obey the law."

I looked at the tired faces of my advisers. The hour was growing late. I felt exhaustion setting in, but I wanted to talk with the American people and endeavor to reassure them. I knew many were frightened, bewildered, and confused. I knew they too had been listening to the alarming reports from the streets of Detroit. I asked my staff to arrange for a television statement, because I wanted the American people to understand why the federal troops were needed. I spoke to the nation from the White House at 11:58 P.M.:

I am sure the American people will realize that I take this action with the greatest regret and only because of the clear, unmistakable, and indisputed evidence that Governor Romney of Michigan and local officials in Detroit have been unable to bring the situation under control. . . . Law enforcement is a local matter. . . . The federal government should not intervene—except in the most extraordinary circumstances. . . . I call upon the people of the ravaged areas to return to their homes, to leave the streets, and to permit the authorities to restore quiet and order without further loss of life or property damage.

I finished the statement in ten minutes and returned to the Executive Mansion with several of my assistants. We watched the latest network reports of the riot conditions. "Well," I said finally, "I guess that is all for tonight. I guess we had better get some sleep. Thank you all . . . thank you very much."

At 2:30 A.M. the main body of paratroopers reached the riot area. As General Throckmorton later described it,\* the federal troops entered a city saturated with fear. The National Guardsmen were afraid, the citizens were afraid, and the police were afraid. In the confusion of the darkened streets bullets seemed to be flying from every direction. Without lights it was almost impossible to pinpoint the exact location of the snipers. Residents huddled together on the floors of their darkened apartments. Dozens of innocent persons were injured.

That was the atmosphere into which our paratroopers were thrust. Under these circumstances, General Throckmorton set one primary goal for the paratroopers—to reduce fear and restore a semblance of normalcy. Strict orders were given not to fire unless it was certain that the person to be fired upon was a sniper out to kill. Within hours the areas patrolled by the paratroopers were the quietest in the city. But the preceding hours had taken a heavy toll: 43 persons had been killed, 324 injured, and 7,231 arrested.

As I read the reports, several questions haunted me: What if the federal

\* See the *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968), p. 56.



troops had arrived earlier? What if they had been on the scene before dark? Could some of this bloodshed have been avoided? If I had acted without Governor Romney's and Cy Vance's certification and full concurrence, a dangerous precedent would have been set. Such an action would have gone against the best judgment of all my advisers, and I was bound by the constitutional requirement of certification. But there are always the haunting questions.

The black and stifling smoke had scarcely lifted from the streets of Detroit when an even thicker smoke descended upon the Capitol, the smoke of partisan politics. In this dense atmosphere my concern for constitutional requirements was interpreted by critics as "playing politics," and throughout the country the deep-seated, demanding problems of the ghettos were overshadowed by oversimplified talk of a black conspiracy.

I believed then and believe now that we can never achieve a free society until we suppress the fires of hatred and turn aside from violence, whether that violence comes from the nightriders of the Ku Klux Klan or the snipers and looters in Detroit. Neither old wrongs nor new fears justify arson or murder. A rioter with a Molotov cocktail in his hands is not fighting for civil rights any more than a Klansman wearing a sheet and a mask.

When violence breaks out, my instinct is to ask: What caused it? What can I do about it? It is necessary to search for the deeper causes from which anger and tension grow, the privations and indignities and evidence of past oppression or neglect. In the 1960s that evidence was all too plentiful.

This was the context in which I created the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, headed by Governor Otto Kerner of Illinois and Mayor John Lindsay of New York. I knew we had to dig below the surface and lay bare the roots of the problem. I asked the commission to find out "What happened, why did it happen, and what can be done to prevent it from happening again and again?" I asked the members to make their search completely free. "Let it be untrammelled by what has been called the conventional wisdom. As best you can, find the truth, the whole truth; express it in your report."

The commission completed its report late in February 1968. As soon as I received it, I asked each member of my Cabinet to study it and analyze every recommendation to determine (1) which proposals were already being carried out, (2) which would be covered by our 1968 legislative program, and (3) which had not yet been adopted. The Bureau of the Budget pulled together the individual agency responses.

This analysis reflected extremely close agreement between the commission's proposals and the administration's program. The major difference lay in the scale of effort recommended. The commission called for a substantially increased outlay of resources, doubling or tripling each ongoing

program. The Bureau of the Budget estimated that the recommendations would cost in the vicinity of \$30 billion, in addition to the \$30 billion plus already in the budget for the poor.

That was the problem—money. At the moment I received the report I was having one of the toughest fights of my life, trying to persuade Congress to pass the 10 per cent tax surcharge without imposing deep cuts in our most critical Great Society programs.\* I will never understand how the commission expected me to get this same Congress to turn 180 degrees overnight and appropriate an additional \$30 billion for the same programs that it was demanding I cut by \$6 billion. This would have required a miracle.

With the chance of congressional action so extremely limited, I believed that the key to the report lay in its assertion that "the major need is to generate new will—the will to tax ourselves to the extent necessary to meet the vital needs of the nation." The Kerner report went partway in helping to create this "public will." Its finding that the riots were not caused or carried out by organized plan was useful in unlocking the public's mind on the whole issue of riots. Until people realized that all the riots and demonstrations were not the product of conspiracy, there was little hope of persuading them to focus on fundamental causes—on poverty, discrimination, inadequate schooling, substandard housing, slums, and unemployment.

I would have been delighted to have had an appropriation of an additional \$30 billion to solve the problems of our cities, but I knew that was unrealistic. Setting such an unattainable goal could easily have produced a negative reaction that in turn might have endangered funds for the many invaluable programs we had fought so long to establish and were trying so hard to strengthen and expand.

A President cannot appropriate public funds by fiat. Nor can he be, as President Theodore Roosevelt once wished, both "President and Congress too."

A President's limitations are never more evident than when he hears of the death of another man. In that ultimate situation a President is only a man and can do little or nothing to help. I rarely have felt that sense of powerlessness more acutely than the day Martin Luther King, Jr., was killed.

I awakened in the morning feeling optimistic. Something very good had happened the day before, April 3, 1968. The government of North Vietnam had indicated readiness to contact U.S. representatives so that peace talks might begin. "Perhaps," I thought, "a real breakthrough has arrived at last."

At noon the next day I flew to New York City for the investiture of

\* See Chapter 19.

the new Catholic Archbishop of New York, Terence James Cooke. Our helicopter touched down in Central Park and we drove to St. Patrick's Cathedral by car. It was a bright, spring day. Hundreds of people lined the streets. They cheered as we drove by. When we entered the church, the congregation broke into spontaneous applause. The church escort said that this had happened on only one other occasion—the visit of His Holiness Pope Paul VI in 1965.

After the ceremony, I stopped at the United Nations to talk with Ambassador Goldberg and Secretary General U Thant. We had a good talk; Hanoi's agreement had given all of us a great lift.

We returned to Washington at dusk. I went back to my office. I remember how quiet the West Wing seemed. Several members of the White House staff—advisers, secretaries, and typists—had already gone to Andrews Air Force Base and boarded *Air Force One*. That night I had planned to go to Hawaii for a strategy meeting with our representatives from South Vietnam. The conference had been scheduled for several weeks. The important development of the preceding day had given the meeting a special significance.

The world that day seemed to me a pretty good place.

But at 7:30 P.M. that mood was completely shattered by a message on a plain white piece of paper brought to me by my aide Tom Johnson: "Mr. President: Martin Luther King has been shot."

A jumble of anxious thoughts ran through my mind. What does it mean? Was it the act of one man or a group? Was the assassin black or was he white? Would the shooting bring more violence, more catastrophe, and more extremism?

A second message arrived at 8:20, from my press secretary, George Christian: "Mr. President: Justice has just advised that Dr. King is dead."

My thoughts turned at once to Mrs. King and her children. I remembered a picture I had seen only a week before of the entire lively family. I called Mrs. King and tried to comfort her as best I could.

Shortly after 9 P.M. I went before the television cameras to make a statement to the American public. I spoke from the West Lobby, the same spot from which, twenty-four hours earlier, I had announced Hanoi's agreement. I said:

I ask every citizen to reject the blind violence that has struck Dr. King, who lived by nonviolence. . . . We can achieve nothing by lawlessness and divisiveness among the American people. It is only by joining together and only by working together that we can continue to move toward equality and fulfillment for all our people.

I finished my statement and returned to my office and canceled my trip to Hawaii. The strain of the day and this new tragedy were having their effect, but there was no letting up.

The trouble in Washington, D.C., was just beginning. Crowds had started forming at 14th and U Streets, Northwest, at the first word of the King shooting. The atmosphere was hushed. Men, women, and children stood together awaiting further news. At 8:30 P.M. the news media reported Dr. King's death. The crowds started moving north on 14th Street, asking proprietors to close their stores out of respect for Dr. King. Most of the storeowners complied at once. The predominant mood was one of nonviolence, sorrow, and mourning. But one hour later that mood shifted. Inflammatory speeches filled the air; anger and bitterness fanned out. Wild rumors spread. A few windows were smashed. A few items were stolen. I began to fear that once again the dangerous cycle had begun, and my fears came true.

By the next day entire blocks of buildings were going up in smoke. Helmeted troops were patrolling the littered streets. Before the holocaust was over, forty other cities had experienced similar tragic outbreaks—Chicago, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Kansas City, Trenton, Youngstown, Jacksonville, and on and on and on, from coast to coast.

Perhaps the most disturbing thing about the April riots was the fact that so many of us almost instinctively expected them to happen as soon as the news of Dr. King's death was made known. Were we becoming conditioned to the violence? That prospect disturbed me far more than the initial shock of Watts or Detroit.

The death of a public figure produces a strong interplay of private and public emotions. In the chaos and confusion I reached out instinctively to the Negro leaders with whom I had worked over the years—among them Roy Wilkins; Whitney Young, Jr.; Clarence Mitchell; Walter Washington, Mayor of Washington, D.C.; Bayard Rustin, Executive Director of the A. Philip Randolph Institute; Leon Sullivan, Director of the Opportunities Industrialization Center in Philadelphia; Judge Leon Higginbotham of Philadelphia; Richard Hatcher, Mayor of Gary, Indiana; Walter Fauntroy of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; and Bishop George Baber of Philadelphia.

I asked these men to meet with me at the White House on the morning after Dr. King's death. I thought it important for the country to see us all working together in an effort to make some sense out of this senseless tragedy. And I needed their advice.

I also invited King's father, Martin Luther King, Sr., to join us. I knew that he would want to be part of anything positive we could possibly bring out of the sacrifice of his son's life. My message reached him at 2 A.M. through one of my staff members: "The President wants you to know his prayers are with you." "Oh, no," he said, "my prayers are with the Presi-



dent. And I want so badly to be there tomorrow to do whatever I can." At that point a nurse got on the line to say that Dr. King was not well and should not make the trip; he had to preserve his strength for the funeral. I understood completely and I admired his ability to think of his country at a time of such private grief.

I wanted Dr. King to know how much his concern meant to me. I thought there would be a chance to thank him at the funeral. But once again the strange mixture of public and private capacities inherent in the Presidency prevented free action. As a private citizen I could have gone to the funeral in Atlanta. But as President of the United States I had to heed the unanimous judgment of the Secret Service and the FBI. The situation in Atlanta was tense and dangerous; they recommended in the strongest terms that I not attend the funeral.

I met with the civil rights leaders in the Cabinet Room at 11 A.M. on Friday morning, less than seventeen hours after the fatal shooting. "I have asked you here today—you leaders of government, the Court, the Congress, the executive community, the Negro community, the white community, the religious community—to demonstrate America's unity and commitment, to demonstrate to the people of the United States that those who served the cause of justice in the past, along with King, are determined to save that cause now."

We talked together about the perils of the situation. We knew that none of us had found an effective way to reach the militant youths on the streets. Try as we might, we had not been able to bridge the gap in leadership style, mood, and language. But in spite of this we *had* to keep moving onward.

Bayard Rustin and Reverend Sullivan captured the essence of our discussion: The large majorities of the Negroes are not in favor of violence, they said, but we need something to fight back with; we need something positive to carry to the people. Otherwise we'll be caught with nothing. And the people just won't behave in a vacuum.

I decided that we should seize the opportunity and press for an open housing law. For two years we had struggled unsuccessfully for legislation to prohibit discrimination in the sale and rental of housing. We had lost our first battle in 1966. The Senate had killed our bill with a month-long filibuster. We lost again in 1967, when the committee system buried the bill. In January 1968 observers overwhelmingly predicted a third defeat. The pressures for compromise grew stronger and stronger. Most of my advisers, black and white, argued for abandoning the legislative struggle in favor of an Executive order.

I went against my advisers on this one. But one man stuck with me—Clarence Mitchell. He knew the depth of opposition at the grassroots level. In his tireless months of lobbying on this issue he had witnessed the

impact of the backlash slogans: "Open housing is forced housing" . . . "A man's home is his castle" . . . "A man's got a constitutional right to sell to whomever he wants."

He knew how difficult it would be, even with legislation, to induce the people in the heartlands and the suburbs, the cities and the countryside, to change their deep-seated sense of individualism in buying and selling their homes. Mitchell believed, as I did, that without the moral force of congressional approval behind us, the struggle for open housing would be lost before it had even begun. A new Executive order might put more words in the books but it would not put more Negroes into decent houses.

I decided to go all the way. In January 1968 I had proposed legislation for the third time. Now, in the wake of tragedy, that housing legislation seemed more essential than ever before. Continued delay and failure would be a victory for the forces of stalemate and repression. It would feed extremist charges that the "system" was no longer working. On the other hand, passage of the bill would demonstrate America's faith in its Negro citizens and prove the continued strength of moderate leadership, both black and white. It could be a new beginning.

There was reason to hope. In the earlier open housing battles Senator Dirksen had led the opposition. Without his support, it was impossible to stop a filibuster. The Senator knew how strongly I felt about ending this unfair discrimination. But until he felt the urgency on his own, there was little we could do.

Late in February Senator Dirksen shifted his position: "One would be a strange creature indeed," he said, "in this world of mutation if, in the face of reality, he did not change his mind." In the early months of 1968 that reality was clearly changing. On every cloture vote our forces in the Senate were growing stronger. Clarence Mitchell's endless hours of work were beginning to show results. Dirksen could sense the shifting tide. He chose to master that tide. With his support, we once again broke the back of the filibuster. The bill reached the floor on March 11, and surprisingly it passed the Senate that same afternoon.

Speculation immediately centered on the motive behind Dirksen's switch. The rumor mill explained his shift as based on a supposed promise from Washington to "force" the Democratic party in Illinois to deliberately put up a weak candidate to assure Dirksen's victory in his forthcoming campaign for reelection.

I never once discussed supporting Dirksen's 1968 Illinois election with him. No President could "force" a strong local party, headed by as forceful a person as Mayor Richard Daley of Chicago, to commit political hara-kiri—especially over a bill that most of his constituents did not want anyway.

With Senate passage, the fate of the bill rested with the House and,

more particularly, with that graveyard of so much progressive legislation, the Rules Committee. The first test vote in the committee came on March 19. We used all the arguments and moral forces we could muster but we lost again, by one vote.

Partisan politics proved our undoing. By that time the open housing issue had become a Democratic liability. More and more Republicans tried to base their 1968 campaigns on promises to protect the individual from "LBJ's bureaucrats," who, they said, would be "swarming over every neighborhood setting up Negro-white quotas, forcing homeowners to sell their property, and encouraging vicious gangs of rioters and looters to destroy neighborhoods which dare to resist."

Things looked bleak. But on March 31, 1968, a new factor entered the equation. I was no longer a candidate of the Democratic party; I was simply the President. That made a tremendous difference, as I had hoped it would when I made my announcement. So there was reason for hope in that first week of April after Martin Luther King's death, but we had to move quickly. Riots were spreading from one city to another, and we knew how swiftly those riots could turn normal compassion into bitterness, anger, and retaliation.

The morning after Dr. King's death I sent letters to both Speaker McCormack and Minority Leader Ford, stressing that "the time for action has come." The second vote in the Rules Committee was scheduled for April 9, the day after Dr. King's funeral. We worked on it the entire weekend, night and day. This time our efforts paid off. The Rules Committee voted to keep the Senate bill intact and to send it to the House floor. Within twenty-four hours the full House gave its approval to the omnibus Civil Rights Act of 1968.

I signed the bill on April 11, 1968, in the presence of many of the Negro leaders with whom I had met the week before. They had all helped produce this victory. As I returned to my office, I thought to myself how different the mood of this day was from that just one week earlier.

So it went . . . some days bright with promise, others shadowed by tragedy; hours of grief, hours of joy; moments of doubt, moments of hope. Spring turned to summer and summer to fall. My term as President was drawing to a close. It was a time for farewells.

I remembered in particular a blustery evening late in autumn. The Urban League had invited me to a dinner in New York City. The room was filled to capacity with more than 2,000 guests. My thoughts that night were with old friends like Whitney Young, Roy Wilkins, Clarence Mitchell, Bayard Rustin, and A. Philip Randolph.

For five long years we had worked side by side, in sadness, joy, anger,

and triumph. We had reached together the peaks of victory—the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Fair Housing Act of 1968, the Federal Jury Reform Act of 1968. We had stayed together in the valleys of failure—the summer riots, the burnings, the killings, and the assassinations.

Some of us tried to express our feelings that night. We talked about old times. We relived the struggles. It was a warm, sentimental evening. But nothing meant more to me than the presentation made by Whitney Young. The Urban League, he announced, was pledging \$100,000 to establish a scholarship fund in my name at the Lyndon Baines Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas to provide annual fellowships for deserving black students.

In that fleeting moment the past merged with the future. A picture of idealistic young men starting out on the road of public service, not knowing what great achievements they might come to know, contrasted sharply with the picture of Gene Williams starting out on the uncertain road to Texas only a few years before, not knowing where he could eat or where he could sleep at night.

We had come a long way. In five short years we had put into law our promises of equality—at the ballot box, the employment center, the jury, the public inn, the public school, and the private housing market.

Distinguished black men and women had assumed their rightful places in the highest offices of the land—the Supreme Court, the Cabinet, the foreign service, the Federal Reserve Board, the mayorship of Washington, D.C., the chairmanship of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. I had chosen these people—Thurgood Marshall, Robert Weaver, Andrew Brimmer, Patricia Harris, Walter Washington, Clifford Alexander—and many others for their competence, wisdom, and courage, not for the color of their skin. But I also deeply believed that with these appointments Negro mothers could look at their children and hope with good reason that someday their sons and daughters might reach the highest offices their government could offer.

I looked around the room once more. Most of those present were men and women of my generation. We had given everything we had to the struggle, and we had seen many of our towering dreams come true. We could look back at landmarks we had established on the trail. But we were not yet in sight of the plateau we had to gain before our country could rest. Turbulence was still in the air; restlessness was rampant. The reins of leadership were passing from one generation to another and the American struggle for justice was just beginning.