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Tuesday, March 9th

The day of the second meeting of my Beautification Committee in the Yellow Room where Nathaniel Owings over coffee cups showed us slides of the history of the Mall, beginning with the original grand design of Pierre Charles l'Enfant -- interestingly enough, he had sent Congress a bill for 90 thousand dollars for his years-long work on the City of Washington, and had finally collected, I believe, three thousand. Let that not be a warning, I hope, for the Planners!

And then we went on down to the changes during the Nineteenth Century. Quite recently, really, there was a steam plant right in the middle of the Mall! Rather surprisingly, Van Buren had been one of those with extensive plans for the Mall, but they got no place. Then the McMillan Commission in the early 1900's helped bring l'Enfant's vision closer to fruition.

Mr. Owings' plan includes a Sculpture Garden and outdoor restaurant in the large empty square between the Museum of Natural History and the National Gallery of Art. He wants to banish automobiles from the Mall area, divert traffic through tunnels underneath, have underground parking, use mini-buses and your own feet for transportation up and down the Mall, have a reflecting pool at the Capitol end of the Mall similar to the one in front of the Lincoln Memorial, preserve the tapis vert -- that is, the long green ribbon that stretches majestically

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from the Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial. All of that is fine, but I hope very much to add some masses of color that would show up in a year or two in this town, because the great plan proposed will take a decade or so.

At about 11:30 we started out in gay striped mini-buses, all 30 or so of us, Mary Lasker and Libby Rowe close at hand with me, and made our first stop at the Smithsonian Museum of History and Technology, where Dillon Ripley showed us his charming plan for having awnings and tables and chairs and light refreshments and music on the terrace, beginning in June.

And then we stopped at the Mall where, bordering a heavy traffic area that crosses the Mall, there is a long new bed of pansies, a carpet of purple and gold, and I planted a symbolic few to finish it off for the eye of the camera.

The substance of the day was wrapped up in one line from the newspaper story that said "The First Lady hopes that the planting will mark the beginnings of an extensive floral beautification program throughout the Nation, in public housing areas, in schools, in parks, and on highways and elsewhere."

The next stop was at one of the little triangles down close to the Capitol, right in front of the HEW, where Maryland and Virginia

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Avenues and Second Street converge, I believe. It is one of the 761 little park triangles or squares or circles formed by the way l'Enfant first drew up the city. It was quite grey and dismal, with a little scabrous grass and a couple of leaning benches, but one or two nice trees. Nash Castro of the National Park Service had planted some very respectable-sized dogwood trees. I am delighted at my first trip down there and reporting that they were "just little switches" <sup>had</sup> caused him to put in larger ones! And underneath them he had put in a goodly number of the 500 pink and white azaleas, large ones, that the City of Norfolk had sent up because Luci used to be their Azalea Queen. I was to use the shovel on putting in one of the last azalea bushes.

This could be a charming little spot. We talked about taking the before-and-after pictures, and it can be a good capsuled statement of the possibilities.

Next we bounced along in the gay little mini-bus to Greenleaf Gardens, a housing area of modest little brick row houses, where a small crowd of the neighborhood folks were gathered to greet me, including two school bands, who performed loudly and enthusiastically, if not with perfection.

This is Walter Washington's bailiwick and his great enthusiasm. In fact, it was he who had talked me into saying a few words here. I

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enjoyed it, because people are what's important. Mr. Washington introduced me and I made a small speech in a sort of Saturday Evening Post cover setting, with little children wandering around, the band at attention. I talked about my own gardening days.

"It's a strange thing about flowers -- none are ever as pretty as the ones belonging to you, the ones you worked on yourself. I think the trees I always loved best were the dogwood, the weeping cherry, and the flowering crab I planted myself 20 years ago at our first home in Washington."

How amazed I was later when Laurance Rockefeller, no less, remembered that little bit and said something about it made the talk come to life for him.

The gist of the whole stop was what I told Stuart Udall: that all of our efforts will fail unless people in these neighborhoods can see the challenge and do the work on their own front yards and porches. It was a good start, a good morning.

We got back to the White House about one, I feeling that in my limited way I had done what I could to get the Beautification Program off to a beginning. Stuart Udall is its real motive power and Laurance Rockefeller and Mary Lasker its great assets.

In the afternoon I worked with Ashton on correspondence, on my little decorating projects, and took a nap! It was not that sort of a day

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for Lyndon. It was a day of tension and strain, with quiet little Selma, Alabama, dominating the news. But to some extent the tension eased up. The marchers, led by the Reverend King, walked the prescribed distance -- I believe it was across that bridge I have driven on so many times -- and then turned around at a specified point and followed the Reverend King back, in accord with the court order. I heard later that he did not know when he turned whether anyone would be following him. But this was victory; this was sanity; a temporary restraining lid on the volcano to grant time for the good sense of the Nation and a strong Voting Rights Bill in Congress to save us from catastrophe.

Another small plus was that the Senate confirmed the Ambassador to Ireland, so Lyndon was feeling good, granted all the troubles, when we met for the Congressional Reception at 6:30. This was the ninth of the lot, and included Texans Bob and Hazel Casey, John and J. D. Dowdy, young Jed Johnson, Jr., whose father Lyndon had served with, who always reminds me how old we're getting! Pretty Becky Rogers and her husband Paul from Palm Beach, Florida, my old campaign friend Basil Whitener and his wife -- I remember being on the stage with them in a little North Carolina town to which we had flown in bumpy weather in a small plane, and Congressman and Mrs. John Tunny of California -- he's the son of the former heavy-weight champion. And when I had met him on a campaign

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trip last Fall in California he had quoted, amazingly, from Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida, lines on how to step down from being a popular idol in the limelight, as his father had once been, into being unknown, a has-been. An unusual young politician.

It was the usual working session, a long briefing that ended after 9, with the ladies probably already starving. John Connally was in town, later joined us and stayed after the Congressional guests departed, talking long in the bedroom with Lyndon. It was not until later that I learned about the ugly happening in Selma -- the beating of the Reverend Reeb that sent him to the hospital and made infinitely more dangerous the forces of tension and destruction in Selma and across the country. So it was one step forward and two steps backwards.