

Gen. Jelston  
Easton, Md.  
TA 2-1300

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

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Lee White  
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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

May 27, 1964

MEMORANDUM FOR THE FILES

This afternoon at about 3:15 pm, Walter Jenkins and I had a joint telephone conversation with Governor Tawes of Maryland and Ed Mester, the Governor's Assistant. We discussed at some length the situation in Cambridge, Maryland and learned that the community is extremely tense and there could be an explosion of violence at almost any time.

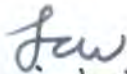
Tonight around 7:30, Dick Gregory, Mrs. Gloria Richardson and Stanley Branche of Chester, Pennsylvania, expected to go into Cambridge. The Governor indicated that the 10:00 curfew barring civil rights demonstrations and meetings imposed by General Gelston, in charge of the National Guard Unit stationed in Cambridge, could not be relaxed to permit Gregory to hold a public meeting. They recognize that Gregory's promise made last night to return to Cambridge poses a problem if Gregory is denied the right to hold a show, program or meeting. On the other hand, it is their view that if they relax the curfew, the white community will regard this as partiality and weakness on the part of the National Guard and may elect to take matters into their own hands. General Gelston was to meet the Gregory party in Easton, Maryland, in an effort to encourage Gregory to limit his activities in Cambridge tonight to discussions with very small groups of Negroes in various restaurants and other small gathering places. This may do the trick, but quite candidly the situation could erupt into serious shooting. Many Negroes are armed, and the National Guard is understandably nervous since a National Guardsman (incidentally a Negro) was wounded two days ago.

The Governor also advised us that General Reckord, his Adjutant General, was meeting with Secretary of the Army Ailes to discuss the possibility of special Federal troops taking over the responsibility of policing Cambridge. The Governor indicated that the cost of \$500,000 a week to maintain the Guard was becoming too burdensome, and he was anxious to explore the possibilities of relinquishing

responsibility to Federal troops. When asked whether he had or was making a formal request, the Governor indicated that this was in his mind to do so, but made it clear that he had not yet decided to take such action. I suggested to him that any such formal request would have to be based on the assumption that the State of Maryland was incapable of handling the situation in Cambridge and that this obviously posed some problem for him.

Our conversation with Governor Tawes ended with his assurances that he would keep us advised, and we indicated again our concern, our desire to be kept informed and our willingness to be of assistance in any proper way that we could.

Following the conversation with the Governor, I talked to Secretary Ailes who advises that General Reckord sought only to determine whether the Army would use Federal troops or Federalize the State National Guard should the State of Maryland formally request Federal assistance. Ailes responded to the General by indicating that he could not respond to a hypothetical question of that character, but that he would welcome any specific information about the impact that the Cambridge assignment had had on the State Guard. The General promised to try to pull the information together and to supply it and that ended his conversation with the Secretary.

  
Lee C. White



THE WHITE HOUSE

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May 27, 1964

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: Cambridge, Maryland

Burke Marshall called to report that the situation in Cambridge, Maryland is extremely critical. Last night open conflict was avoided only by the presence of Dick Gregory, the comedian from Chicago, and Harvey Branche from Chester, Pennsylvania in Cambridge. Mrs. Richardson is away from the city and there is absolutely no leadership in the Negro community. They are extremely agitated although they have no clear idea of what their demands should be.

In order to quiet the situation last night Gregory promised to return to Cambridge tonight to put on a show. The National Guard Commander, General Gelston had issued an order that no meetings or demonstrations could take place during the next 10 days. The General (on a confidential basis) believes that the show should be permitted and that this would not violate the letter or the spirit of his order. Governor Tawes' Assistant, who is handling this (Ed Mester) believes that to permit the entertainment could well antagonize the white community to the point where they would create disturbances and possibly riots.

Burke and the Attorney General believe that Gregory can contain the situation if permitted to hold the promised show. If he does not go to Cambridge on orders from the military or if he goes after receiving orders not to there could be serious trouble. There are many guns in the Negro community and a National Guardsman was wounded slightly by gunfire two days ago.

The Justice Department believes it would be desirable if someone from the White House staff called Governor Tawes to express the great concern that the Justice Department has expressed regarding the situation, urging

him to familiarize himself with the matter personally and offering any assistance that the Federal government may be able to provide.

Another possible approach would be for you to announce that the situation is so critical in Cambridge (the only city in the United States under martial law) that you have asked a personal representative (preferably one individual and either inside of government or from private life, but not identified with civil rights) to go to Cambridge to survey the situation and to report back to you. This could conceivably buy some time and the situation is so explosive that General Gelston is the one who has suggested this approach, again on a confidential basis. Obviously, there is some difficulty in Presidential involvement in a particular city situation. On the other hand it is so desperate that there could be an awful lot of people killed tonight.

Lee C. White