

June 17, 1968

FOR Joe Califano

FROM Matt Nimetz

As you requested I checked the President's statement of June 5, 1968, concerning the shooting of Senator Kennedy, to see whether Jack Valenti's comments about it were justified.

Jack got the impression that the speech emphasized the "sickness" of our society -- an attitude that we have been hearing from some commentators. In particular, Jack was troubled by "a theme that recurred in the body of the speech, the notion that our society is disfigured, that we are sick and violent and that this assassination somehow was a mirror of that affliction."

I can see how Jack got that impression, although the President actually went out of his way to disclaim this view of America. The key passage, I believe, is the following:

"Tonight this Nation faces once again the consequences of lawlessness, hatred and unreason in its midst. It would be wrong, it would be self-deceptive, to ignore the connection between that lawlessness and hatred and this act of violence. It would be just as wrong, and just as self-deceptive, to conclude from this act that our country itself is sick, that it has lost its balance, that it has lost its sense of direction, even its common decency.

"200 million Americans did not strike down Robert Kennedy last night any more than they struck down John F. Kennedy in 1963 or Dr. Martin Luther King in April of this year."

This passage is a clear statement against the "sickness of America" thesis, which blames the deaths on the American people.

However, the President did emphasize that a high level of violence in our society does set the stage for many of the unhappy events of

the last years. In addition to the passage quoted above, the President said:

"But those awful events give us ample warning that in a climate of extremism, of disrespect for law, of contempt for the rights of others, violence may bring down the very best among us. A Nation that tolerates violence in any form cannot expect to be able to confine it to just minor outbursts."

This statement does not accuse America of sickness. It does call attention to the violence and the disrespect for law that is a contemporary phenomenon in America. These factors did not "cause" the assassinations; but they did provide a climate in which such individual acts of violence were more likely to occur. This is the precise point that the new Commission on Violence will seek to learn something about.

Attachment

Memorandum for the President from Jack Valenti dtd Jun 6/1968.

MN/djb

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

4:00_{am}

Mr. Califano:

Mr. Gaither did not call in
early this a.m. nor did he send
anything to the President. How-
ever, I did find the memo he was
looking for last night re State
funerals. It is attached.

pt

*File: Death of Senator Robert F.
Kennedy*

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

June 5, 1968

FOR JOE CALIFANO

FRMM JIM GAITHER

State funerals by law may be accorded to Presidents, Ex Presidents, Presidents elect, and other persons specifically designated by the President. Bill Hopkins does not recall any state funerals for people other than Presidents or Ex Presidents. The military aides office (Sgt. Mjr. Gutley) can recall only one other instance : General Pershing. In no case has such a funeral been accorded to a Senator or Ex Cabinet official, to the best of their recollection.

The law also authorizes an "official" funeral for the Vice President, Chief Justice, Cabinet Members, or other Government officials or foreign dignitaries designated by the President. The basic difference between a State funeral and an official funeral is that in the latter case the body does not lie in state in the rotunda of the Capital. To the best recollection of the above people, an official funeral has never been accorded a Senator or Ex Cabinet official.

If you want a complete list of people accorded a State or official funeral, I will have to call the Military district of Washington for that information, with the risk of leaks. Do you want me to check with the Military District?

YES _____ NO _____

June 5, 1968

TO: Joe Califano

FROM: James C. Gaither

Attached are all the President's statements on crime. I sent over earlier those dealing with gun control.

Attachments

June 6, 1968

TO: Joe Califano

FROM: James C. Gaither

I have received calls from Bert Harding and Secretary Udall's office concerning arrangements for the Kennedy services in New York and the funeral here on Saturday. Secretary Udall is planning to go to New York tomorrow and would like some guidance as to whether there will be an official delegation, transportation, etc.

Bert Harding feels that OEO should be represented at the services in New York and at the funeral, particularly with Sarge Shriver returning from Europe. He is prepared to go to both of these, but is waiting for guidance from us as to the Administration plans.

I assume that most of the Agency and Department heads have similar questions and should be informed once the decisions are made.

JUNE 5, 1968

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE

STATEMENT OF THE PRESIDENT
ON THE SHOOTING OF
SENATOR ROBERT F. KENNEDY
THE FISH ROOM

AT 10:07 P.M. EDT

My fellow citizens, I speak to you this evening not only as your President, but as a fellow American who is shocked and dismayed, as you are, by the attempt on Senator Kennedy's life, deeply disturbed, as I know you are, by lawlessness and violence in our country, of which this tragedy is the latest spectacular example.

We do not know the reasons that inspired the attack on Senator Kennedy. We know only that a brilliant career of public service has been brutally interrupted; that a young leader of uncommon energy and dedication, who has served his country tirelessly and well, and whose voice and example have touched millions throughout the entire world, has been senselessly and horribly stricken.

At this moment, the outcome is still in the balance. We pray to God that He will spare Robert Kennedy and will restore him to full health and vigor. We pray this for the Nation's sake, for the sake of his wife and his children, his father and his mother, and in memory of his brother, our beloved late President.

The Kennedy family has endured sorrow enough, and we pray that this family may be spared more anguish.

Tonight this Nation faces once again the consequences of lawlessness, hatred and unreason in its midst. It would be wrong, it would be self-deceptive, to ignore the connection between that lawlessness and hatred and this act of violence. It would be just as wrong, and just as self-deceptive, to conclude from this act that our country itself is sick, that it has lost its balance, that it has lost its sense of direction, even its common decency.

200 million Americans did not strike down Robert Kennedy last night any more than they struck down John F. Kennedy in 1963 or Dr. Martin Luther King in April of this year.

But those awful events give us ample warning that in a climate of extremism, of disrespect for law, of contempt for the rights of others, violence may bring down the very best among us. A Nation that tolerates violence in any form cannot expect to be able to confine it to just minor outbursts.

My fellow citizens, we cannot, we just must not, tolerate the sway of violent men among us. We must not permit men who are filled with hatred, and careless of innocent lives, to dominate our streets and fill our homes with fear.

MORE

(OVER)

We cannot sanction the appeal to violence, no matter what its cause, no matter what the grievance from which it springs.

There is never -- and I say never -- any justification for the violence that tears at the fabric of our national life; that inspires such fear in peaceful citizens that they arm themselves with deadly weapons; that sets citizen against citizen or group against group.

A great nation can guarantee freedom for its people and the hope of progressive change only under the rule of law. So let us, for God's sake, resolve to live under the law.

Let us put an end to violence and to the preaching of violence.

Let the Congress pass laws to bring the insane traffic in guns to a halt, as I have appealed to them time and time again to do. That will not, in itself, end the violence, but reason and experience tell us that it will slow it down; that it will spare many innocent lives.

Let us purge the hostility from our hearts and let us practice moderation with our tongues.

Let us begin in the aftermath of this great tragedy to find a way to reverence life, to protect it, to extend its promise to all of our people.

This Nation and its people have suffered grievously from violence and assassination. For this reason, I am appointing, with the recommendation of the Leadership of the Congress -- with whom I have talked this evening -- a commission of most distinguished Americans to immediately examine this tragic phenomenon. They are:

Dr. Milton Eisenhower, the former distinguished President of Johns Hopkins University.

Archbishop Terrence Cook of New York.

Albert E. Jenner, Jr., of Illinois.

Ambassador Patricia Harris.

Mr. Eric Hoffer.

Senator Philip A. Hart.

Senator Roman Hruska.

Congressman Hale Boggs.

Congressman William McCulloch.

Judge Leon Higginbotham.

MORE

The commission will look into the causes, the occurrence and the control of physical violence across this Nation, from assassination that is motivated by prejudice and by ideology, and by politics and by insanity, to violence in our cities' streets and even in our homes.

What in the nature of our people and the environment of our society makes possible such murder and such violence?

How does it happen? What can be done to prevent assassination? What can be done to further protect public figures? What can be done to eliminate the basic causes of these aberrations?

Supported by the suggestions and recommendations of criminologists, sociologists and psychologists, all of our Nation's medical and social sciences, we hope to learn why we inflict such suffering on ourselves. I hope and pray that we can learn how to stop it.

This is a sober time for our great democracy, but we are a strong and we are a resilient people who can, I hope, learn from our misfortunes, who can heal our wounds, who can build and find progress in public order.

We can. We must.

So I appeal to every American citizen tonight:
Let us begin tonight.

END

(AT 10:18 P.M. EDT)