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RADIO AND TELEVISION ADDRESS TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE ON THE
SITUATION IN LITTLE ROCK, SEPTEMBER 24, 1957

[Delivered from the President's Office at 9:00 p.m.]

Good Evening. My Fellow Citizens:

For a few minutes this evening I want to speak to you about the serious situation that has arisen in Little Rock. To make this talk I have come to the President's office in the White House. I could have spoken from Rhode Island, where I have been staying recently, but I felt that, in speaking from the house of Lincoln, of Jackson and of Wilson, my words would better convey both the sadness I feel in the action I was compelled today to take and the firmness with which I intend to pursue this course until the orders of the Federal Court at Little Rock can be executed without unlawful interference.

In that city, under the leadership of demagogic extremists, disorderly mobs have deliberately prevented the carrying out of proper orders from a Federal Court. Local authorities have not eliminated that violent opposition and, under the law, I yesterday issued a Proclamation calling upon the mob to disperse.

This morning the mob again gathered in front of the Central High School of Little Rock, obviously for the purpose of again preventing the carrying out of the Court's order relating to the admission of Negro children to that school.

Whenever normal agencies prove inadequate to the task and it becomes necessary for the Executive Branch of the Federal Government to use its powers and authority to uphold Federal Courts, the President's responsibility is inescapable.

In accordance with that responsibility, I have today issued an Executive Order directing the use of troops under Federal authority to aid in the execution of Federal law at Little Rock, Arkansas. This became necessary when my Proclamation of yesterday was not observed, and the obstruction of justice still continues.

It is important that the reasons for my action be understood by all our citizens.

As you know, the Supreme Court of the United States has decided that separate public educational facilities for the races are inherently unequal and therefore compulsory school segregation laws are unconstitutional.

Our personal opinions about the decision have no bearing on the matter of enforcement; the responsibility and authority of the Supreme Court to interpret the Constitution are very clear. Local Federal Courts were instructed by the Supreme Court to issue such orders and decrees

as might be necessary to achieve admission to public schools without regard to race—and with all deliberate speed.

During the past several years, many communities in our Southern States have instituted public school plans for gradual progress in the enrollment and attendance of school children of all races in order to bring themselves into compliance with the law of the land.

They thus demonstrated to the world that we are a nation in which laws, not men, are supreme.

I regret to say that this truth—the cornerstone of our liberties—was not observed in this instance.

It was my hope that this localized situation would be brought under control by city and State authorities. If the use of local police powers had been sufficient, our traditional method of leaving the problems in those hands would have been pursued. But when large gatherings of obstructionists made it impossible for the decrees of the Court to be carried out, both the law and the national interest demanded that the President take action.

Here is the sequence of events in the development of the Little Rock school case.

In May of 1955, the Little Rock School Board approved a moderate plan for the gradual desegregation of the public schools in that city. It provided that a start toward integration would be made at the present term in the high school, and that the plan would be in full operation by 1963. Here I might say that in a number of communities in Arkansas integration in the schools has already started and without violence of any kind. Now this Little Rock plan was challenged in the courts by some who believed that the period of time as proposed in the plan was too long.

The United States Court at Little Rock, which has supervisory responsibility under the law for the plan of desegregation in the public schools, dismissed the challenge, thus approving a gradual rather than an abrupt change from the existing system. The court found that the school board had acted in good faith in planning for a public school system free from racial discrimination.

Since that time, the court has on three separate occasions issued orders directing that the plan be carried out. All persons were instructed to refrain from interfering with the efforts of the school board to comply with the law.

Proper and sensible observance of the law then demanded the respectful obedience which the nation has a right to expect from all its people. This, unfortunately, has not been the case at Little Rock. Certain misguided persons, many of them imported into Little Rock by agitators, have insisted upon defying the law and have sought to bring it into disrepute. The orders of the court have thus been frustrated.

The very basis of our individual rights and freedoms rests upon the certainty that the President and the Executive Branch of Government will support and insure the carrying out of the decisions of the Federal Courts, even, when necessary with all the means at the President's command.

Unless the President did so, anarchy would result.

There would be no security for any except that which each one of us could provide for himself.

The interests of the nation in the proper fulfillment of the law's requirements cannot yield to opposition and demonstrations by some few persons.

Mob rule cannot be allowed to override the decisions of our courts.

Now, let me make it very clear that Federal troops are not being used to relieve local and state authorities of their primary duty to preserve the peace and order of the community. Nor are the troops there for the purpose of taking over the responsibility of the School Board and the other responsible local officials in running Central High School. The running of our school system and the maintenance of peace and order in each of our States are strictly local affairs and the Federal Government does not interfere except in a very few special cases and when requested by one of the several States. In the present case the troops are there, pursuant to law, solely for the purpose of preventing interference with the orders of the Court.

The proper use of the powers of the Executive Branch to enforce the orders of a Federal Court is limited to extraordinary and compelling circumstances. Manifestly, such an extreme situation has been created in Little Rock. This challenge must be met and with such measures as will preserve to the people as a whole their lawfully-protected rights in a climate permitting their free and fair exercise.

The overwhelming majority of our people in every section of the country are united in their respect for observance of the law—even in those cases where they may disagree with that law.

They deplore the call of extremists to violence.

The decision of the Supreme Court concerning school integration, of course, affects the South more seriously than it does other sections of the country. In that region I have many warm friends, some of them in the city of Little Rock. I have deemed it a great personal privilege to spend in our Southland tours of duty while in the military service and enjoyable recreational periods since that time.

So from intimate personal knowledge, I know that the overwhelming majority of the people in the South—including those of Arkansas and of Little Rock—are of good will, united in their efforts to preserve and respect the law even when they disagree with it.

They do not sympathize with mob rule. They, like the rest of our nation, have proved in two great wars their readiness to sacrifice for America.

A foundation of our American way of life is our national respect for law.

In the South, as elsewhere, citizens are keenly aware of the tremendous disservice that has been done to the people of Arkansas in the eyes of the nation, and that has been done to the nation in the eyes of the world.

At a time when we face grave situations abroad because of the hatred that Communism bears toward a system of government based on human rights, it would be difficult to exaggerate the harm that is being done to the prestige and influence, and indeed to the safety, of our nation and world.

Our enemies are gloating over this incident and using it everywhere to misrepresent our whole nation. We are portrayed as a violator of those standards of conduct which the peoples of the world united to

proclaim in the Charter of the United Nations. There they affirmed "faith in fundamental human rights" and "in the dignity and worth of the human person" and they did so "without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion."

And so, with deep confidence, I call upon the citizens of the State of Arkansas to assist in bringing to an immediate end all interference with the law and its processes. If resistance to the Federal Court orders ceases at once, the further presence of Federal troops will be unnecessary and the City of Little Rock will return to its normal habits of peace and order and a blot upon the fair name and high honor of our nation in the world will be removed.

Thus will be restored the image of America and of all its parts as one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Good night, and thank you very much.

NOTE.—The President referred to Proclamation 3204 "Obstruction of Justice in the State of Arkansas" and Executive Order 10730 "Providing Assistance for the Removal of an Obstruction of Justice Within the State of Arkansas," published in the Federal Register (22 F.R. 7628) and in Title 3 of the Code of Federal Regulations.

SPECIAL MESSAGE TO THE CONGRESS ON CIVIL RIGHTS, FEBRUARY 5, 1959

To the Congress of the United States:

Two principles basic to our system of government are that the rule of law is supreme, and that every individual regardless of his race, religion, or national origin is entitled to the equal protection of the laws. We must continue to seek every practicable means for reinforcing these principles and making them a reality for all.

The United States has a vital stake in striving wisely to achieve the goal of full equality under law for all people. On several occasions I have stated that progress toward this goal depends not on laws alone but on building a better understanding. It is thus important to remember that any further legislation in this field must be clearly designed to continue the substantial progress that has taken place in the past few years. The recommendations for legislation which I am making have been weighed and formulated with this in mind.

First, I recommend legislation to strengthen the law dealing with obstructions of justice so as to provide expressly that the use of force or threats of force to obstruct Court orders in school desegregation cases shall be a Federal offense.

There have been instances where extremists have attempted by mob violence and other concerted threats of violence to obstruct the accomplishment of the objectives in school decrees. There is a serious question whether the present obstruction of justice statute reaches such acts of obstruction which occur after the completion of the court proceedings. Nor is the contempt power a satisfactory enforcement weapon to deal with persons who seek to obstruct court decrees by such means.

The legislation that I am recommending would correct a deficiency in the present law and would be a valuable enforcement power on which the government could rely to deter mob violence and such other acts of violence or threats which seek to obstruct court decrees in desegregation cases.

Second, I recommend legislation to confer additional investigative authority on the FBI in the case of crimes involving the destruction or attempted destruction of schools or churches, by making flight from one State to another to avoid detention or prosecution for such a crime a Federal offense.

All decent, self-respecting persons deplore the recent incidents of bombings of schools and places of worship. While State authorities have been diligent in their execution of local laws dealing with these crimes, a basis for supplementary action by the federal government is needed.

Such recommendation when enacted would make it clear that the FBI has full authority to assist in investigations of crimes involving bombings of schools and churches. At the same time, the legislation would preserve the primary responsibility for law enforcement in local law enforcement agencies for crimes committed against local property.

Third, I recommend legislation to give the Attorney General power to inspect Federal election records, and to require that such records be preserved for a reasonable period of time so as to permit such inspection.

The right to vote, the keystone of democratic self-government, must be available to all qualified citizens without discrimination. Until the enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1957, the government could protect this right only through criminal prosecutions instituted after the right had been infringed. The 1957 Act attempted to remedy this deficiency by authorizing the Attorney General to institute civil proceedings to prevent such infringements before they occurred.

A serious obstacle has developed which minimizes the effectiveness of this legislation. Access to registration records is essential to determine whether the denial of the franchise was in furtherance of a pattern of racial discrimination. But during preliminary investigations of complaints the Department of Justice, unlike the Civil Rights Commission, has no authority to require the production of election records in a civil proceeding. State or local authorities, in some instances, have refused to permit the inspection of their election records in the course of investigations. Supplemental legislation, therefore, is needed.

Fourth, I recommend legislation to provide a temporary program of financial and technical aid to State and local agencies to assist them in making the necessary adjustments required by school desegregation decisions.

The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare should be authorized to assist and cooperate with those States which have previously required or permitted racially segregated public schools, and which must now develop programs of desegregation. Such assistance should consist of sharing the burdens of transition through grants-in-aid to help meet additional costs directly occasioned by desegregation programs, and also of making technical information and assistance available to State and local educational agencies in preparing and implementing desegregation programs.

I also recommend that the Commissioner of Education be specifically authorized, at the request of the States or local agencies, to provide technical assistance in the development of desegregation pro-

grams and to initiate or participate in conferences called to help resolve educational problems arising as a result of efforts to desegregate.

Fifth, I recommend legislation to authorize, on a temporary basis, provision for the education of children of members of the Armed Forces when State-administered public schools have been closed because of desegregation decisions or orders.

The Federal Government has a particular responsibility for the children of military personnel in Federally affected areas, since Armed Services personnel are located there under military orders rather than of their own free choice. Under the present law, the Commissioner of Education may provide for the education of children of military personnel only in the case of those who live on military reservations or other Federal property. The legislation I am recommending would remove this limitation.

Sixth, I recommend that Congress give consideration to the establishing of a statutory Commission on Equal Job Opportunity under Government Contracts.

Non-discrimination in employment under government contracts is required by Executive Orders. Through education, mediation, and persuasion, the existing Committee on Government Contracts has sought to give effect not only to this contractual obligation, but to the policy of equal job opportunities generally. While the program has been widely accepted by government agencies, employers and unions, and significant progress has been made, full implementation of the policy would be materially advanced by the creation of a statutory Commission.

Seventh, I recommend legislation to extend the life of the Civil Rights Commission for an additional two years. While the Commission should make an interim report this year within the time originally fixed by law for the making of its final report, because of the delay in getting the Commission appointed and staffed, an additional two years should be provided for the completion of its task and the making of its final report.

I urge the prompt consideration of these seven proposals.
