

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

October 24, 1969

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MEMORANDUM FOR:

The Attorney General

John Ehrlichman

I had a rough but possibly promising meeting today with a group of prominent Washingtonians who feel that the state of the District of Columbia has deteriorated to a point near disaster and that they want to try and do something to help. Though their goal was extremely vague at the start of our discussion, I had some hope at the end that they may provide the beginnings of a broader based movement of support from blacks and whites for the President's program in the District. The group, which is extremely informal, was organized by Robert Baker, the President of the American Security and Trust Company, who invited us to his wood-paneled board room for this "off the record" talk. There were present: General E. R. (Pete) Quesada (the first head of the Federal Aviation Administration under President Eisenhower), Katharine Graham (the publisher of the Washington Post), Edward Bennett Williams (the defense lawyer and Redskins owner), Dillon Ripley (Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution), and David Ginsburg (the lawyer and former head of the Riot Commission).

Mr. Baker opened the discussion, speaking for the group, by saying that they were all near to desperation about the District's decline: crime rates were soaring, the economy was spiraling downward, many businesses were moving out to the suburbs, and the District Government seemed incompetent to deal with the situation. The impetus for his effort, Mr. Baker confided, was a conversation with Walter Washington in which the Mayor admitted, "I just don't know what to do about crime," and asked, almost pitifully, for Mr. Baker's counsel and support. They all felt,

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another of the group said, that they had been "around this course" many times before, without much consequence, and that they were all nearly ready to give up. They almost implied that the President was to blame for not seizing control of District affairs -- and wondered what they should do.

Though crime seemed to be the subject uppermost in their minds, they seemed to know almost nothing of the President's proposals in this area or his very vigorous attempts to mobilize support in Congress. Edward Bennett Williams said that he was "embarrassed for my profession" by the scandalous delays in court action, and the ease with which dangerous criminals were freed on bail. He and others indicated support for measures to give judges preventive detention discretion, but he said he was not sure that the President's proposals would eliminate court delays or go to the heart of the crime problem. He contended that many more policemen were needed -- "not one thousand, but two thousand more" -- and that the District had a Chief of Police who "does not seem to think he needs help." They also argued for reforms in the organization of the police force, such as increased use of clerks for clerical work, designed to put more policemen on the streets.

In response, I emphasized the vast potential of the President's D. C. program, and the paucity of support from any of the District's citizenry. The President decided at the very beginning of the Administration that he was going to let the District govern itself as much as possible, regarding local government as truly responsible for local affairs and thereby preparing the District for larger measures of self-government. We had provided support and counsel where requested by the Mayor. We had furnished generous amounts of Federal funds for rebuilding the riot-damaged areas. We had fought hard for the District's revenue package, and other D. C. interests on the Hill. We had lined up broad support among Republicans for measures that would provide a Commission on Self-Government and a Non-Voting delegate in Congress. We had recommended a powerful combination of measures to deal with crime -- here I described the President's four bills, and the state of inaction in the House District Committee. In return, I told them, we had received nothing but carping and criticism from the white liberal elite. This elite has created a climate in which no responsible citizen, particularly no responsible black, can publicly support

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measures to control crime. They have let Richard Nixon do the dirty work of proposing and fighting for crime control measures, while they have given credence to black leaders who extol riots as rebellion and describe police as pigs. They have called for Home Rule while complaining that the present District Government, headed by a black Mayor, is incapable of running the city and should be fully programmed by the White House.

Though at first the reaction to these points was somewhat hostile, the mood gradually began to shift and most of those present, by the end of the discussion, had offered to try to help us. I suggested that they should attempt to broaden their group -- particularly attempt to gain support for crime measures from responsible blacks. In the meantime, one of my Assistants, Richard Blumenthal, who was present, will arrange a detailed briefing on the President's D. C. crime program for Williams and Ginsburg early next week (Donald Santarelli has agreed to lead the briefing, and Bud Krogh will also attend.)

Support from such individuals might help change the climate of opinion within the District, as well as on the Hill, though it is easy to overestimate their influence. I would be interested in your comments or directions.



Daniel P. Moynihan

Copy to:  
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