

Re: A Modest Proposal for the Annexation of the City of Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee

To: President John Fitzgerald Kennedy and Loyal American Citizens Everywhere---

We have heard that America is a country which believes that her citizens are endowed with certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness;

That it is a land of opportunity for all men and women regardless of race, creed, color or national origin;

That its constitution guarantees the rights of citizens to vote freely, to worship as they please, to speak openly, to live where they please, and the right to work in their chosen vocations.

Mr. President, we have further heard that in America the Hebraic-Christian tradition is the guiding spirit which motivates the action of all citizens, and human dignity is regarded as an inherent quality of all persons.

History records that a century ago the fertile soil of America ran "red" with the blood of men and women who fought and died in the victorious struggle to raise human rights above all else as a capstone of the nation's way of life. Since the formal conclusion of that war, we citizens of the South who believe in the great values which all our forefathers purchased in blood, have been prayerfully waiting and peacefully struggling for the recognition of human dignity and respect for all men.

Tragically while you call us to launch out on the "New Frontier" of life, we here in Memphis are engulfed with unsolved problems of the old frontier which America treats as formally closed with the surrender of Lee at Appomatox Court House, but which many here in the South have kept open through post civil war renegade guerilla actions, waged in such places as Biloxi, Miss., Little Rock, Ark., Montgomery, Ala., New Orleans, La., Athens, Ga., and Fayette and Haywood Counties in Tennessee. Not by skilled soldiers responding to the call of honor but by motley street mobs responding to the call of demagogues preying upon racial prejudice.

The Negro citizens of Memphis are still denied job opportunities because of their race; Negroes are forced to accept separate and therefore inferior education because of race; Negroes are denied the use of most of our parks and recreational facilities because of race; Negroes are still met with insulting signs marked "white only" in our public libraries and other public tax supported facilities.

The merchants of the South are so greedy that they invite all people to purchase their wares, yet so prejudiced that they deny Negro patrons the right to decent jobs and the right to use such comforts as lunch counters, lounges and nurseries.

The Negro is further degraded when he is forced to live by discriminatory laws which are applied to his conduct by segregated juries in segregated courtrooms before judges, some of whom are obviously prejudiced and whose verdicts are too often enforced by police tyranny and brutality.

This system of the South not only cripples the Negro, it also cripples the white southerner who believes in christianity and democracy by forcing him to live the life of a hypocrite when he conforms to the "southern way of life."

In Memphis almost 200 Negro students and adults have been jailed while peacefully attempting to secure their constitutional and moral rights. Hundreds more have walked the picket lines for eight months in attempts to prevail on the moral conscience of the public officials, merchants and the community as a whole, but nowhere can be heard from these sources the voice of right and righteousness crying out in their defense.

How long must the Negro community alone continue to bear the burden of making democracy a living reality?

"How long will justice hang on the scaffold and wrong reign from the throne?"

How long will the christian minister remain silent or turn his head in the face of christianity's greatest stain?

So long as these evils persist, the Negro will continue to resist them, even though the road may be watered with tears and reddened with the blood of the innocent. He will continue to resist and protest by these legal means:

- A. Exercising his right to vote
- B. Seeking justice by court action
- C. Sit-ins, stand-ins, and kneel-ins, etc.
- D. Peaceful picketing
- E. Refusing to spend money with people who practice racial discrimination in any form.
- F. Soliciting the cooperation of all people who believe in democracy, christianity and the "American way of life."

We firmly believe that the white citizens of the South will make good and loyal Americans once they, too, agree to pay the price that true liberty has always demanded.

Therefore, Mr. President, we petition you to use the resources of your office to secure the annexation of Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee, to the United States of America so that all citizens may participate in the challenge of democracy as we are taught through the principles so beautifully expressed in such documents as the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, The Emancipation Proclamation, the Supreme Court's 1954 Decision and your magnificent Inaugural Address.

Mr. President, we ask you to take this action not for what America can do for us, but what we, if given a chance, can do for America

Respectfully yours,

Memphis Branch, NAACP

Jesse H. Turner

President,

(Rev.) H.C. Nabrit

Chairman, Freedom Committee