

William B. Hartsfield Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 01/06/1966
Administrative Information

Creator: William B. Hartsfield
Interviewer: Charles T. Morrissey
Date of Interview: January 6, 1966
Place of Interview: Atlanta, Georgia
Length: 10 pages

Biographical Note

Hartsfield was the Mayor of Atlanta, Georgia from 1937 to 1961. In this interview Hartsfield discusses the 1960 presidential election; the sit-in demonstrations in Atlanta in the fall of 1960; Martin Luther King's arrest in Atlanta; the meeting between Hartsfield and the demonstrators; the idea to have John F. Kennedy [JFK] speak out to have King released from jail; proposing this idea to the Democratic National Committee; the reaction in the national press to JFK's supposed intervention on behalf of King; JFK's immediate acceptance of the plan; John C. Calhoun and the Republican National Committee's unwillingness to get Richard M. Nixon similarly involved; and other memories of JFK, among other issues.

Access

Open.

Usage Restrictions

According to the deed of gift signed October 31, 1973, copyright of these materials has been assigned to the United States Government. Users of these materials are advised to determine the copyright status of any document from which they wish to publish.

Copyright

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excesses of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form. Direct your questions concerning copyright to the reference staff.

Transcript of Oral History Interview

These electronic documents were created from transcripts available in the research room of the John F. Kennedy Library. The transcripts were scanned using optical character recognition and the resulting text files were proofread against the original transcripts. Some

formatting changes were made. Page numbers are noted where they would have occurred at the bottoms of the pages of the original transcripts. If researchers have any concerns about accuracy, they are encouraged to visit the Library and consult the transcripts and the interview recordings.

Suggested Citation

William B. Hartsfield, recorded interview by Charles T. Morrissey, January 6, 1966, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

of William B. Hartsfield

to the

JOHN F. KENNEDY LIBRARY

I, Mrs. William B. Hartsfield, of Atlanta, Georgia, do hereby give to the John F. Kennedy Library, for use and administration therein, all my rights, title and interest, except as hereinafter provided, to the tape recording and transcript of the interview conducted with Mr. William B. Hartsfield at Atlanta, Georgia on January 6, 1966 for the John F. Kennedy Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. The interview is to be open immediately to general research.
2. Researchers who have access to the transcript of the interview may listen to the tape; however, this is to be for background use only. Researchers may not cite, paraphrase or quote from the tape.
3. I hereby assign literary property rights in this interview to the United States Government.
4. Copies of the interview transcript may be provided upon request to any researcher.
5. Copies of the interview may, upon request, be deposited in other institutions.
6. This agreement may be revised or amended by mutual consent of the parties undersigned.

Mrs. William B. Hartsfield
Mrs. William B. Hartsfield

James B. Rhodes
Archivist of the United States

10-19-73
Date

October 31, 1973
Date

Oral History Interview

with

WILLIAM B. HARTSFIELD

January 6, 1966
Atlanta, Georgia

By Charles T. Morrissey

For the John F. Kennedy Library

HARTSFIELD: In the fall of 1960 the sit-in demonstrations began all over the South. At that time Martin Luther King was assuming the leadership due to his famous Montgomery street car fight. The sit-ins started in Orangeburg, South Carolina with a group of Negro students; it spread all over the South. Very soon the sit-ins began to take place here in Atlanta. Naturally we were trying to keep peace in the community. We had adopted a policy of decency and fairness towards the Negro people. When the sit-ins began to be organized on the campuses I went out and tried to talk them out of it, because naturally, as mayor, I was afraid that any downtown demonstrations would incite counter actions-- would bring out the Ku Klux and their sympathizers and result in disorder. However, the movement would not be denied, so things boiled with the Negro students sitting-in; mostly at our largest department store. They took the position that since the dry goods stores solicited the Negro trade that they should not bar them from the lunch counter or rest rooms. They also sat-in at the 5 and 10 cent stores and since these were national organizations the Negro students had a pretty good leverage to force settlements.

Then the thing boiled on with more and more demonstrations and finally a group of Negro students, headed by Dr. Martin Luther King, attempted to get service in the swank restaurant of Rich's Department store. Dr. King was arrested and put in our jail along with certain others. That made the national headlines. As mayor I knew that the time had come when somebody had to step in and effect a settlement. I called the Negro leaders over to my office. This was on a Saturday

morning and city hall was closed. I had to have the door opened and the council chamber prepared for them. So they piled in. Of course, the national press was attracted. At this time these sit-ins were new; they were great news. What is accepted today was quite unaccepted then. So the national press was there, the television people--NBC, ABC--and all the other news media were all there because Dr. King at that time had attained national stature. Incidentally, the presidential race was in full swing between Senator Kennedy and Vice President Richard M. Nixon.

I asked the Negro preachers and students and those interested in the sit-ins to meet in the council chamber and I addressed them and expressed a desire for some sort of settlement. They asked me to leave while they perfected their own organization and made certain agreements among themselves as to who would be the spokesman and so forth.

I then went back to my office and by that time the telegrams from all over the nation were mounting. I got telegrams from Negro leaders, from Negro organizations all over the nation. I got telegrams from Maine, flocks of them from New York, from New Jersey, from Pennsylvania, from Illinois, from the West Coast--Los Angeles, up and down the coast--nationally. The telegrams began to pile in so much that I phoned the telegraph company and said, "Listen boys, bring these over in batches. You don't have to send every one over." I looked at the pile of telegrams and realized that practically every Negro in America was interested in that case. So my friend, Mr. Morris Abram, who heads several very prominent Jewish organizations and is a very fine lawyer here at that time and now in New York City; he was a friend and adviser to me on racial matters, walked in, and says, "May I help you? I know you're on the spot." I said, "Just sit here and talk to me."

So we looked at that gigantic pile of telegrams and my political instincts began to assert themselves. Morris looked at them; I looked at them. And I said, "Great goodness, this presidential race is close. None of us knows which way New York's going; none of us knows which way Illinois is going and the Negro vote counts heavily." Morris said to me, "Gee whiz, Mayor, if Kennedy had this" (we were both for Kennedy, you know) "and could grab this, wouldn't it be wonderful?" And I said, "It sure would." He said, "Let's call the Democratic National Committee and see if we can't get Kennedy to take a hand. It'll help. It'll be national publicity and it will throw the Negro vote on his side, without any question." I said, "Let's do it." He said, "Harris Wofford is in charge of minorities at the national committee." So we put in a call. Morris talked to him and explained the thing--Morris Abram. And then I got on the phone. Wofford was a little hesitant.

He was consulting those that were around him. [Robert F.] Bobby Kennedy was in the room and John Seigenthaler and several others. They were talking among themselves. Harris explained to us that the vote was going to be exceedingly close and that everybody had to walk a chalk line, not do anything to upset the balance. They were afraid. King was controversial all over the South. The white politicians hated him and were making noises. It was quite a decision to have to make.

I said to Harris, "If Kennedy would come out for him being released from our jail, in my opinion you won't disturb the other side." Wofford said, "Well now, what'll it do to Georgia?" [Governor S. Ernest] Vandiver and [Herman E.] Talmadge and all the state power structure is mad about the race question. Will they turn Georgia against us?" And I said, "Listen, Fellow, Georgia has always been Democratic. Have you forgotten that it went for [Alfred E.] Al Smith who was a crusty old Irishman and I don't think he even came into the state? But he was a Democrat and he carried Georgia." And I said, "Georgia's going for Kennedy." And I made the laughing remark, "Listen fellas, if Kennedy were a one-legged Chinaman who couldn't speak English he'd carry it on the Democratic ticket." Of course, you know, that was before the awful exacerbation of the Civil Rights Acts and the rise of Negro extremism which resulted in the [Barry] Goldwater vote which wasn't a Goldwater vote, it was a made Democrat vote.

But I tried to sell them on it. They saw my point, but they said, "This is a decision that has got to be made by Kennedy himself as to whether he will express some sympathy for Dr. King and thereby align himself before the Negroes of the Nation in asking you, the mayor, to turn him out." I suggested that Kennedy show an interest in Dr. King and a friendly settlement and request me to turn him out for the simple reason that I was going to turn him out anyway as a part of the settlement. I knew what kind of settlement I was going to offer to the Negro preachers and leaders. I was going down there and say, "If you will give me a 30 day truce, I will promise to try to get a settlement for you. I will be your advocate to try to get these merchants to agree to a general custom in this city to admit Negroes to their lunch room and I will also see that Dr. King is turned out of jail." I knew they would accept it because they couldn't hardly do anything else. I was giving them everything practically they wanted. I wanted Senator Kennedy to get the benefit of it with Negroes in doubtful states.

So then they brought up in the National Committee the idea they might lose South Carolina--that was very, very close. I said, "My opinion is South Carolina is going Democrat. Maybe I don't know, but I don't think the Republicans are going to carry them. I don't think you've got to worry about it. I don't think you've got to worry about these Georgia state officials because they can't do anything now. It's only about

a couple of weeks, ten days or so, before the election. They couldn't stump the state and change it if they wanted to. They'll fuss, but Georgia will still go Democratic. Don't you worry about the South. You're going to carry the majority of the South and don't let this worry you." Then I said, "I'm only asking Kennedy to do what I, as mayor, am going to do. Why should he be afraid to go any farther than the local southern mayor on the spot? I'm going to offer that, so he might as well get the credit for it. Now have him do this." They said, "We can't locate him." Finally I said, "Well, let me locate him."

And Morris Abram was taking part in it helping me with it. So they gave me three numbers out in Kansas. They said, "The senator's campaigning in his private plane out in Kansas." They gave me these three towns. I called all three. I couldn't get him, of course. In one place the phone was in a hanger and everybody was hoopin and a hollerin and a band was playing and some policeman said, "He's just left." Then I called the next town and they were hoopin and hollerin and cheerin. "Well, yes, the plane is out on the field," or something. Nobody would give a hoot about a long distance call with a presidential candidate coming in. So I called the next town and he hadn't arrived. I saw the foolishness of trying to have an important political conversation with a fellow in the middle of his campaign tour. So I called them back and I said, "I can't get him."

And then time was running out on me. You see, all this was taking place in the period of about a half hour, forty-five minutes. I said, "I've got to go down to this meeting. I'm going to make this proposition." "Now," I said, "We can't get hold of Senator Kennedy, but I know him well enough" (I had met him; been around him; knew his friends) "that he will see the political gold in this and will buy it. I also think he would sincerely approve my action." And I said, "Here's all in the world I would want you to do." They had previously told me that they would be able to talk to him that night. That no matter where he was campaigning, every night he had about an hour's conversation with the committee in Washington as to what was happening. I said, "When he has that, explain this whole thing to him. Tell him everything I've said. Tell him I'm going to turn King out and I know he'll buy it." Finally I called them back again and I said, "I can't wait any longer. Now here's what I'm going to do for our candidate. I'm just so certain that his taking a position will help him with this doubtful Negro vote all over the Nation, that I'm going to take it on myself to tell this group that Senator Kennedy is asking me to intervene. That he has asked me to turn Martin Luther King loose." And I said, "Why should he be ashamed of that?"

-5-

I'm going to turn him loose anyway. I know he'll buy it if he just but knew it."

So I went down to this group and I said, "This is what I want. I'm asking you, please give me this truce. I'm going to try to settle it for you if I can. I will turn Martin Luther King loose and I want you to know that Senator Kennedy has evidenced his interest in this thing. He has phoned me to help get a peaceful settlement and he has also asked me to turn Martin Luther King loose."

Then I went back up to the office and before the press conference, while the Negro committee was voting on that, which I knew they would accept, all the national press was outside the locked doors waiting. I called Washington again. I said, "Here's all in the world I now ask you fellows. I know John F. Kennedy well enough to know that this is what he would want me to do and I'm doing it as his agent because I can't get hold of him. If I had talked to him it would be all over. And I know I'm doing what he would want. All I ask of you is this: I know that the minute I announce this now, because in a few minutes, the spokesman for the Negro committee will come out--we have a joint press conference and when I say that Kennedy has intervened--the wires will be hot in a few minutes, you will be asked for confirmation. All I ask you to say is not to repudiate me, just say that Mayor Hartsfield has evidently gotten hold of the senator out in Kansas where he is campaigning and this is something we don't know anything about. You'll have to ask us tonight when we get in touch with Mr. Kennedy." That is the trick.

I made the announcement. The national press carried it and as I knew it would happen, the minute John Kennedy heard about it that night he bought it in a minute and he picked the phone up and called Mrs. King and unquestionably, unqualifiedly placed himself on record in behalf of turning Dr. King loose and of a peaceful settlement. He bought it, which is what he would have bought that morning if I had been able to get in touch with him. That was about 1 o'clock in the afternoon when this phoning took place--on a Saturday. So the national press carried it. That night Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, everywhere, carried headlines that Kennedy had intervened in behalf of Dr. King.

What happened the next day made Senator Kennedy's position more valuable. The next day, after it got in the press--mind you, all this was behind the scenes on Saturday, these calls to Washington--the next day the papers carried the fact that the senator had indeed called Mrs. King and alligned himself in behalf of leniency and a peaceful settlement. The next day his position was made more valuable by the antics of a local DeKalb judge, Judge [Oscar] Mitchell,

who announced to the national press that he had an old traffic case against Martin Luther King and was going to hold him when I let him loose. Well, that made the whole nation mad because, you know, everybody's had a traffic case. Everybody regardless of race, color or creed got in the act then--"That's unfair." And it made the senator's position still more valuable.

Now let me give you an aftermath. There was in that audience a Negro, John C. Calhoun, who was vice-chairman of the Republican party in Georgia. The minute I made that announcement in that council chamber, that Senator Kennedy had intervened, John Calhoun got up and asked to be excused. I knew exactly what he was going to do. When the Negro committee was voting on my proposition he walked out of the locked door, and I walked out up to my office to await the result. Mr. Calhoun asked me for the use of a phone. He had to, since city hall was locked up and the switchboards were closed on Saturday. So I gave him a straight line phone on my secretary's desk knowing what he was going to do. I found out (by overhearing him) he was calling the Republican National Committee to tell them. I found out later from Calhoun that he got as far as Leonard Len Hall. They told him that the race was very close and Mr. Nixon didn't want to upset the apple cart laughter and would he write all the facts by air mail. That was funny. We were doing business over the phone and they told him to write him by air mail.

I later found out from Calhoun, after it was all over, that the Republican committee told him that they had a meeting and they had decided it would be unwise for Mr. Nixon to upset the apple cart in Georgia and South Carolina which he hoped to carry and didn't. They decided that in order to show the sympathy of the Republican party for the Negro and for Dr. King and not hurt Nixon, they would have President Dwight D. Eisenhower issue a statement deploring the situation and I don't think he ever got around to issuing it. It wouldn't have done it much good if he had Eisenhower's interest, as compared to the direct interest of Senator Kennedy. So Senator Kennedy showed fine judgment. He bought it just as quickly as anybody could have told him. He would have bought it, had I been able to get him. But that was what happened and I think that, it had quite an effect on the Negro vote. At that time they were in doubt.

You must remember that at that time a Republican was in the White House and this Republican was Eisenhower who had sent the troops into Little Rock. Therefore the Negro had before him-- that is, as a mass--the fact that the only actual, or what you might call positive action in their behalf, had been at Little Rock by President Eisenhower.

7

MORRISSEY: Did you ever get a chance to talk to others around the candidate about this matter? Did you ever talk to Theodore C. Sorensen or F. Kenneth O'Donnell?

HARTSFIELD: No, no, no. Mr. Sorensen was the intellect. I never was intellectual enough to make contact with him, or O'Donnell. I talked to Harris Wofford. Bobby, by the way, was down here . . .

MORRISSEY: Bobby Kennedy?

HARTSFIELD: . . . Bobby as attorney general--and came by my office, sat right there where you're sitting, right there and talked to me. He knew the facts. Those up there in the national committee knew it. But later it was befogged by a lot of other people claiming credit, you know. For instance, the folks that got Judge Mitchell to turn King loose thought they had something to do with it, you know, later. But what we did was to conceive it right there in the mayor's office and to get the tacit agreement of the national committee. They did all they could, you know. They couldn't make that decision without getting hold of Kennedy. There was no ineptitude on the part of anybody. It was a physical thing. You couldn't get hold of him. He was campaigning and here was a fast breaking thing that somebody had to get on top of--you know what I mean in political parlance and news breaking. They had to get on top. Senator Kennedy got on top of it.

And I was afraid, when John Calhoun was out there using the phone, see. I called Harris Wofford back and said, "Listen, man, I'm getting desperate. They are calling the Republicans. What if Nixon comes out for him forthright and immediately? We'll be in trouble." See? In fact I was a little scared there for a while that he might get direct to Nixon and Nixon would buy it on the spot and there we would be. But he didn't. They bungled it as usual. Those in charge of the Democratic National Committee they did what they could. They tried to get me in touch with him, but we just hauled off and did it. I was so confident that that is what he would do, and he did. The minute he got in touch he acted quick--without the slightest provocation. The national committee that was in charge carried out their end of it. They never intimated anything other than this what really happened. They protected me. But we put him in the . . . laughter

MORRISSEY: After Kennedy became president did you ever talk to him about this?

8

HARTSFIELD: No, I never did. I never tried to make any capital out of it; I never wanted any preferment; I never wanted any federal job. I was offered one under President Harry S. Truman and turned it down. Washington is no place an active mayor could be happy, or an active governor. I never wanted anything out of the federal government. My career as mayor was coming to a close and I felt that I had spent all the time in politics that I ought to spend so I was just happy to see him elected. I didn't see him keep any records about it. I even threw all those telegrams away. I should have kept them shouldn't I?

MORRISSEY: Yes.

HARTSFIELD: Because they were the eloquent evidence from every state in the union of the fact that every Negro in America was intensely interested in the treatment accorded Martin Luther King. So I was just glad to see him elected. I didn't keep any records about it. But like I say, others tried to claim the credit but they were operating after the national publicity.

MORRISSEY: Let me ask just one question. When had you met Kennedy previous to this?

HARTSFIELD: Previous to that I had met just to say hi. That's all and he barely knew me. I was at the Democratic National Convention before that, when he made his first national bid. I went around to the Blackstone Hotel during the convention. I didn't have a reservation. I just flew in without it. I don't know why I did it. I wanted to see at least a day or so of the convention. The manager told me--I introduced myself and he said, "Listen, the room's impossible," but he said, "Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt just left her room so I'll give you that." So I took Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt's room. The television was still hot. She had just gotten out. And late that night after the convention I went down to the room. I left the door partly open and two guys came down the hall and I recognized Senator Kennedy (He was running for vice president.) and Mr. John W. McCormack.

MORRISSEY: Oh, John McCormack.

HARTSFIELD: John McCormack was with him and they were knocking on the door of some delegate that they wanted to talk to right next to my room. I stuck my head out and I said, "Hello, Senator." He said, "Hello," and that's all. If I had known he was going to be

president some years later, I'd have pulled him in the room and gone to work. [Laughter] But we had mutual friends, of course, that were enthusiastic about him. Then the man impressed me himself with his youth and the material success of the Kennedy family, you know. In other words there was quality. There was quality in that whole family. There was quality and I sort of worship quality anyway. We've got so little of it. I'm in favor of the uncommon man myself. I mean we should always search for uncommon men and leaders instead of all of us trying to be common. But, I had the pleasure of announcing my open support for him when some of his southern politicians, you know, hung back and played coy. I didn't make any bones about it.

When he came to Warm Springs to make his appearance down there I went down and he invited me to fly on his plane back to Pittsburgh. You see, I was former president of the American Municipal Association and knew all the mayors in the country. I flew with him. [Pierre S.] Salinger was on the plane and Senator [George A.] Smathers. We stopped at Columbia, South Carolina where he made a speech. I rode in the press car down and I went on the platform--quite an experience you know with all those people. He made his speech in Columbia and then got back on the plane and I flew with him to Pittsburgh.

The American Municipal Association, of which I was a member, was having a special meeting there on the subject of slum clearance and things like that. He spoke and, of course, he mixed with them and for political purposes had his picture taken with a lot of mayors. Everybody wants to have himself shown shaking hands with the president, put it up in the office, have it enlarged and brag about it the balance of your life. Everybody was doing that. Those were my pre-election contacts with him.

The election was close, and in such cases, many can claim they did something that tipped the balance. I like to feel that making it possible for Senator Kennedy to capture the Negro voters of New York and Illinois, with an honest alignment in a just cause, may have tipped that balance.

Then later, after the inauguration, I went to Washington with [Anthony J.] Tony Celebrezze, the mayor of Cleveland who later became secretary of health, education and welfare, good friend of mine. We had a testimonial from the mayors of the nation. Tony and I had the mayor of Tucson--I forget his name--were the committee to go to the White House and present this to President Kennedy. He was very friendly to us and very friendly to me. He knew what had happened. He sent me one of his autographed pictures. Then he wrote me a letter about something. I looked at that awful signature. The letter did not identify the president. I sent it back to the White

House and said, "Who is this?" [Laughter] A very loconic reply came back. I think it was from Kenny O'Donnell or Salinger-- just two lines. "Mr. Mayor, that is the signature of the president of the United States." [Laughter] He later sent me a photograph and personally autographed it. And then through one of his assistants I got an intimation that I could have an appointment. I sent word I didn't want anything, I just wanted to see him elected. I didn't need anything in Washington. So that was the story.

Theodore White, author of election of a president, [The Making of the President 1960] visited me later at my office to hear this story.

MORRISSEY: Well, thank you very much.

HARTSFIELD: You're welcome.

April 7, 1964

Mr. Paul Tillett, Editor
Case Studies Program
Rutgers
New Brunswick, New Jersey

Dear Mr. Tillett:

I have your letter of February 21, 1964, enclosing proofs of a study of sit-in demonstrations in Atlanta in 1960-1961. I have read the proofs, and they are surprisingly accurate, considering the many events and large numbers of persons connected therein.

On page 28, at the end of the second paragraph, an event took place that was known only to me as Mayor and Mr. Morris Abram, prominent local attorney now in New York. As a result of the arrest of Dr. Martin Luther King in the restaurant of the largest dry goods store in the South (Rich's), there was nationwide publicity. I began receiving telegrams from every State in the Union, mostly Negro organizations, protesting the arrest.

During the negotiations with the Negro leaders, who were assembled in our Council Chambers under lock and key to keep out a clamorous press, I was requested to leave while they held an organizational meeting and preliminary discussions.

Mr. Abram and I looked over the mounting number of telegrams and decided it would be an excellent gesture for Senator Kennedy to intervene in behalf of Dr. King, since I knew that in making a compromise offer to the assembled group, I was going to offer the release of Dr. King and the other demonstrators as a part of the agreement. We both called the National Democratic Committee, contacting Mr. Harris Wofford, in charge of minorities, and made this suggestion. They were a little nervous over having Senator Kennedy show any interest since the race situation was very tense with the civic leaders in Georgia - and in So. Carolina, too. Everyone admitted that the election was going to be close, and nobody wanted to rock the boat. I suggested to Mr. Wofford that nothing would take Georgia out of the Democratic column, nor did I believe So. Carolina would leave the party, and that it would be a fine gesture for Senator Kennedy to request me to let King out of jail and affect a

peaceful settlement. I was given several phone numbers to try to contact Senator Kennedy who was campaigning in Kansas, but I could not reach him. With the help and advice of Morris Abram, I then called the National Committee again and told them that in my opinion Senator Kennedy would agree if only he could be reached, and that I was going to make the announcement anyway, asking only that they not repudiate me since the national press was outside my door and would grab it quickly.

I then went back into the meeting, made the compromise offer, stating that Senator Kennedy had gotten word to me evidencing his concern for Dr. King.

At this juncture, one of the negotiators present, a Negro citizen, Mr. J. H. Calhoun, asked to be excused from the meeting. He went to a phone and I learned later that he, as Republican Advisory Chairman, was trying to contact the Republican National Committee to enlist the support of candidate Nixon. I later learned he did not get the call through to those in position to make a decision.

When the Negro group accepted my offer of an affirmative effort to get an agreement from the merchants within 30 days, plus the release of Dr. King and the other demonstrators, a joint press conference was held at which I made the statement that Senator Kennedy had intervened in behalf of Dr. King. This made the national wires.

That night the National Democratic Committee evidently got in touch with Senator Kennedy, who promptly endorsed the idea, and put in a call for Mrs. King as evidence of his interest.

The next day a Judge in DeKalb County announced that he would hold Dr. King on a traffic charge, which made further national publicity, and created still greater sympathy for Dr. King and made Senator Kennedy's previously announced position more valuable in seeking support of the Negro voters throughout the Nation.

This entire incident has been described by other writers, but they were going by press releases and public announcements. They knew nothing of the decisions and conversations and private phone calls of Mayor Hartsfield and Mr. Abram to the National Committee, which were the real beginning of something that might have had a great effect in swinging the Negro vote to Senator Kennedy and carrying at least the State of Illinois.

Candor compels me to say that the Negro people are at a very dangerous time in their movement. Negro radicals and extremists are developing, using the same tactics of the white extremists in former years. The white extremists' organizations, particularly the Ku Klux Klan, have been rendered harmless by a campaign of infiltration with informers representing either the F.B.I. or other national organizations, with the result they are now more circumspect and in constant fear of prosecution.

Candor also compels me to say that the Student Non-Violent Committee in Atlanta has fallen into somewhat radical hands. The awful incident at Leb's Restaurant a few weeks ago where a group of demonstrators, most of whom were in their thirties, caused a near riot by committing acts of obscenity and vandalism inside the restaurant, has served to turn many otherwise moderate white citizens against them.

Recruiting campaigns in northern colleges should also be closely watched to see that students are not being tolled into aligning themselves with groups of professional agitators, Communists and other off-beat persons attracted to this movement. Caution should also be exercised to see that serious study groups are not beguiled with exaggerations made in order to raise money.

In my opinion, the American Negro must now restrain some of his own people from acts of extremism, which can only hurt the long-range cause of good racial relations.

Sincerely yours,

William B. Hartsfield

wbh/ctb