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MEET THE PRESS

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MEET THE PRESS

America's Press Conference of the Week

Produced by LAWRENCE E. SPIVAK

*Guest: RAMSEY CLARK
Attorney General of the United States*

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Panel:
HAYNES JOHNSON, *Washington Evening Star*
ROSCOE DRUMMOND, *Publishers-Hall Syndicate*
SAMUEL YETTE, *Newsweek*
CARL STERN, *NBC News*

Moderator: LAWRENCE E. SPIVAK

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MEET THE PRESS

MR. SPIVAK: Our guest today on MEET THE PRESS is the Attorney General of the United States, Ramsey Clark, who earlier this year was designated by the President as coordinator of all Federal activities affecting law enforcement.

The interview with the Chancellor of the Exchequer of Great Britain, Roy Jenkins, originally announced for today, has been postponed.

We will have the first questions now from Carl Stern of NBC News.

MR. STERN: Mr. Clark, does the Justice Department know the name of the man who killed Dr. Martin Luther King?

GENERAL CLARK: We have a name that we are working on. Whether it will prove to be the correct name or not remains to be seen.

MR. STERN: Were the optimistic predictions then of Friday of catching the assassin just an attempt to cool things off or did you really have someone in mind at that time?

GENERAL CLARK: We have a very substantial amount of physical evidence. We remain optimistic and, as I said in Memphis, Friday, very hopeful that we can have an early and successful conclusion to our investigation followed by indictment, prosecution and conviction.

MR. STERN: Have ballistic tests shown that you do have the murder weapon?

GENERAL CLARK: Ballistic tests have been made, and such evidence as they give will be used in court, and soon, we hope.

MR. STERN: Are you certain only one assassin was involved?

GENERAL CLARK: We cannot be absolutely positive. Our evidence still points very strongly in that direction. We have no evidence of the involvement of more than one person at this time.

MR. STERN: It was said the trail stretched several hundred miles. That could be to Georgia or Alabama, or also, to Illinois or Nebraska. What did you mean by that?

GENERAL CLARK: The trail has lengthened since the press conference Friday. I do not believe that it would be appropriate for me to specify places to which it has taken us, but we are running down every lead and we are devoting every possible investigative resource to solve this very terrible murder.

(announcement)

MR. JOHNSON: Mr. Clark, Martin Luther King preached a philosophy of non-violence, and yet, today, I think, many Americans are concerned that we are headed toward a violent future. How do you see the future for this country?

GENERAL CLARK: We can avoid violence. We need to commit ourselves through all of our institutions, our governments, our people, to avoid violence. Perhaps the cruelest tragedy of the murder of Dr. King, who believed in this country, who preached and practiced throughout this land, non-violence, would be for the violence that brought his death to undermine his philosophy. We have to work harder than ever for non-violence. I think even the tragic episodes in so many of our cities in the last 48 hours indicate that we can eliminate this racial violence, this rioting that has occurred.

MR. JOHNSON: There is another side to his philosophy, also. He espoused the principle of civil disobedience, and as you know there were plans made, for instance, to march here, on Washington. Do you think that is advisable, now, given the temper of the times?

GENERAL CLARK: Our times are very difficult, and I think all of our people, our institutions, have to act with great reserve and care. It is imperative that we remain a stable people, that we maintain order and stability, because there is no other way for us to progress, and we must do everything within our power to continue and open lines of communication between Negro and white in this country, to expand those lines and to work for stability. Civil disobedience could be very risky at this time.

MR. JOHNSON: Specifically on these planned demonstrations, would you counsel them not to do so, both here and in Memphis, tomorrow?

GENERAL CLARK: I would counsel any demonstrations, at this time, and in the future—that they be undertaken entirely within the framework of law, that they be undertaken, if at all, under circumstances where control is assured. These are turbulent times. We are a disturbed nation, and the risks are great, and violence more than anything else risks further division. We have to maintain our self-discipline; we have to maintain our national discipline; we have to avoid anything that will tend toward violence. We can show reverence, we have to show reverence; but we have to do this within the rule of law.

MR. YETTE: Mr. Attorney General, this nation prides itself on being a nation of law. At this time we hear, even, the rumors of the possibility of concentration camps for black people. In order to maintain, as you say, order and stability, what are we going to do with respect to concentration camps and that kind of concern?

GENERAL CLARK: There are no concentration camps in this country. There have been no concentration camps in this country. There will be no concentration camps in this country.

Rumors and the fear that arises from rumors, are a great threat to us. Fear, itself, is a great threat, and people who spread false rumors about concentration camps are either ignorant of the facts or have a motive of dividing this country.

MR. YETTE: Murder is not a federal offense, Mr. Attorney General. I am wondering whether, in order to prosecute this case, the Justice Department will try to maintain the conspiracy idea. If you don't find more than one person involved in this assassination, will you then give this case to the State of Tennessee, which has a murder—a capital punishment as a possible sentence?

GENERAL CLARK: Federal law requires and our policy has always been, where a crime of this nature is committed, to defer to the state where there is reason to believe that its laws will be fairly and effectively enforced and prosecutions fairly followed. I have no doubt, no doubt, at this time, that upon the apprehension of this murderer, the authorities of Tennessee would prosecute with all the vigor at their command.

MR. YETTE: Can you say, sir, with the evidence that you now have or clearly anticipate in the future, can you say what the latest time will be in which you expect an arrest to be made?

GENERAL CLARK: No, I cannot. We will do everything we can to make it as soon as possible.

MR. DRUMMOND: Mr. Attorney General, does what has happened since last Thursday night justify the feeling that race relations are getting worse in the United States?

GENERAL CLARK: I think not. I think that is a snap judg-

ment, a too-quick conclusion that can be made. We have had widespread turbulence in, literally, scores of our cities. But this is a turbulence that has not led to some of the things we have seen in the riots of the past. There were more people killed in the Detroit riot last year and the Watts riot in 1965 than in all of the disturbances since the assassination of Dr. King. There has been a firmer control this time, and I think that we can see from this the possibility for riot prevention, for riot control, the possibility to obtain the time needed to fulfill the obligations of this nation to all of our people.

MR. DRUMMOND: Mr. Attorney General, it is said by some and with great earnestness, no doubt, that resort to violence is, at times, understandable because of the deep grievances of the Negro people.

What I really want to ask you is whether you feel there is a single sane word that can be said to the resort to civil violence and civil disorder.

GENERAL CLARK: I think there is clearly a single philosophy. I think it was the philosophy of Dr. Martin Luther King who preached non-violence, who preached change within the framework of order. We have to strive for this. We have to make change. We have to create new and better opportunities for the Negro in America for our poor and for our minorities. In my judgment, we have made more progress in these areas in the last few years than any nation at any time in history. We can make greater progress in the years just ahead. All of our people must devote themselves to this purpose.

MR. DRUMMOND: One more question: In light of what you have said, what would you say should be said about, or what should be done about the statement of Mr. Stokely Carmichael that Negroes should get guns and retaliate in the streets?

GENERAL CLARK: That is absolutely impossible. It is impossible for the Negroes of America. It would be suicidal. They have not done that. There has not been one single police officer or fireman or national guardsman killed in these disturbances of the last 48 to 72 hours. This has not happened. This will not happen. And the Negro people are committed to its not happening. We may have random violence, we may have random physical assault; but we are a mighty nation of 200,000,000 people, and we have to expect some of this.

MR. SPIVAK: Mr. Attorney General, may I ask you a question about Stokely Carmichael. I understand that you are going to make the final decision on whether Stokely Carmichael can be prosecuted for inciting to riot in Washington, D. C. What can you tell us about that?

GENERAL CLARK: The decision will be for the proper law enforcement authorities within the city of Washington. We have

dual jurisdiction, here, federal and local. If we find evidence that meets the standards of criminal justice, that Stokely Carmichael has committed a crime against the federal government, he will be prosecuted and he will be prosecuted with all of the diligence and all of the energies at our command. I can say with absolute assurance that the same is true of the city of Washington. If evidence is found that can be presented to a court that he has violated any law of this jurisdiction, he will be prosecuted and prosecuted vigorously.

I would say further that every effort to obtain such evidence if it exists is being made, has been made, consistently.

MR. STERN: You indicated the search was spreading for the killer of Dr. King. Does that mean you have one man on the run or does it mean you are tracing a chain of organization that may have supported that assassin?

GENERAL CLARK: Our judgment of the evidence at this time is that we have evidence of one man on the run. I should say further, though, that we are tracking down every lead, every possible lead. In a situation like this, you get a lot of bad leads, but we are not turning them off simply because they do not look likely, and therefore this has spread since the day before yesterday.

MR. STERN: We had a description Friday, a man about 5-11 with a long nose and so on. Do we know anything more today, two days later, than we knew two days ago?

GENERAL CLARK: We know quite a bit more today than we knew two days ago, and we hope we can show you a picture of exactly what he looks like before too long. That is our purpose, and we are working with all of our heart on it.

MR. STERN: Do you mean a photograph?

GENERAL CLARK: When we have the man, we can have a photograph. I am sure the press will provide some.

MR. JOHNSON: Were FBI agents assigned to watch Martin Luther King in Memphis?

GENERAL CLARK: The federal government has no jurisdiction to provide protection to private citizens. It has a very limited jurisdiction to provide protection to its own citizens. Of course, the Secret Service watches the President and a few other public officials, and, of course, we are involved all the time in investigations and development of intelligence and in coordination with state and local law enforcement. There was a heavy FBI presence in Memphis before, at and after this incident, but we have no authority and under our system of government could have no authority for direct protective service.

MR. STERN: The reason I asked, in other cases in the South, of murders, in the past, say in Selma, for instance, FBI agents had infiltrated the Klan, and there were immediate arrests. This apparently has not been the case in this situation.

GENERAL CLARK: You recall that in the murder that occurred immediately after the Selma-Montgomery march, which Dr. King led, there was a weapon fired from an automobile, and we had an informant in that automobile. We haven't that situation, here.

MR. YETTE: Mr. Attorney General, if there was a federal presence in Memphis at the time and before and after the assassination, how was it possible for this man to escape?

GENERAL CLARK: The federal presence that was there has been involved for several years, at least, before Selma-Montgomery, in watching activities around Dr. King and around many other people. We have to. We have known how dangerous this situation is. But this was a carefully planned assault. When you look at the physical location, you can see how strategic the position of the assassin was at the time the shot was fired. An escape in an environment such as that with all the traffic and all the excitement that was in the city before this happened is something that is quite understandable under the circumstances.

MR. YETTE: In view of that, sir, why didn't the federal presence, there, advise Dr. King against a second floor balcony room where he was so exposed in that manner?

GENERAL CLARK: Dr. King has lived his life, realizing the risks that he has lived. There have been discussions with many people about how he should conduct himself, and he made this decision knowing those risks. When I speak of federal presence, you must remember that the local presence always exceeds the federal presence, many, many times over. Single police departments in this country have more officers than the entire Federal Bureau of Investigation, in fact, than in the entire civilian police capacity of the federal government. Our presence is a very limited presence.

MR. DRUMMOND: Mr. Attorney General, the reaction to what happened in Europe and around the world has been one of shock and even fear for the stability of American society as it now exists. I would just like to ask whether from your vantage point as Attorney General, you feel that the very fabric of our society is imperiled.

GENERAL CLARK: Mr. Drummond, our nation has been given an immense challenge in these last few days, in this last week. We live in very difficult times. I think we have shown the strength of our society and our people. I think today and tomorrow and in the days ahead, we will show even more the

strength that we have. I do not think our society is imperiled. I think all of our people, our Negro, our white, all of us, are a very strong people and that we will build and work to fulfill the obligations of this great nation.

MR. DRUMMOND: I suspect most people feel at this moment that actions will be more helpful, more significant than words, and I want to ask what you feel Congress could do, in the areas where you have responsibility, that would be most useful in the immediate future.

GENERAL CLARK: Action is the substance of life. It always speaks louder than words, and at this time more than any that I have known we must act. Congress can play a major role. It is imperative that open housing legislation at the federal level be enacted. If we have never known it before—and it is incredible that we haven't—surely in the last several days we have seen: this nation cannot live a divided people; Negroes in the central city, whites elsewhere. We have to have the opportunity to live together, we have to live together. We must work on that. Equal employment opportunity—the Congress can give us new strength at the federal level, here, to provide an equal opportunity for everyone to work and to advance in his work and to fulfill himself.

There are other vital measures that President Johnson has sent to the Congress that we have worked on with all of our energies, that strong members of Congress have done their best to bring into being as the law of the land. I would hope very much that in the next several days and certainly in the weeks ahead, we would see dramatic, bold, new federal legislation directed to this immense problem we have.

MR. SPIVAK: Mr. Attorney General, because there is a similarity of pattern in the looting and the burning and the rioting in city after city, there are many people who believe there is central training and organization involved. Do you think there is?

GENERAL CLARK: Mr. Spivak, the events of the last several days demonstrate more clearly than the events of any other riot situation what an absence there is of training, what an absence there is of planning. This was people who have very little stake in this country, or at least who believe they have very little stake in this country. They walked from their homes and they manifested that lack of conviction that they have a stake in this country. We must give them a stake in this country. But the conduct in these cities was of the most random, the most disorganized type that could be imagined. It was purely capricious.

MR. STERN: The police here received riot training under the guidance of the Justice Department. When the rioting broke out here the police, as per their orders, did nothing for about

twenty-four hours while the looters festively cleaned out one store after another. Is that the strategy that we need in our cities?

GENERAL CLARK: I would have to argue with your characterization of that in several ways. Our guidance here is not a guidance, it is a training, it is a working together as we do with local jurisdictions throughout the country. We have always urged—and I think the police department here did an excellent job in this regard—that the police act firmly, that they act fairly but firmly, that they not over act and that they not under act. To do either can cause an escalation, can cause a riot. If you cannot have immediate police presence, to engage in activity that you cannot carry out as a policeman is the worst thing you can do.

This situation differed from the riots that we have had before. In the past, if you look at Watts, the riot was triggered by a single episode and at a single place in the city, a police arrest. If you look at Newark, the same situation. If you look at Detroit, Michigan, the same situation. Here, we had within a few hours people walking out of their homes from many parts of the city and manifesting their frustration, their belief that they really may have no stake in this country.

I think the police acted firmly, here; I think they acted fairly, here; I think they did a good job. Look at the deaths. Very few deaths compared to what could have been expected under all of these circumstances. There had been good training, here. There was good performance.

MR. STERN: But that is precisely the point. Are we willing to accept unlimited property damage because we don't want to inflict any deaths upon the looters and rioters?

GENERAL CLARK: I don't think that it is really meaningful to compare property to life, here. That is not the issue. I don't think we suffered unlimited property damage, here. The property damage here would be a very small fraction of the property damage at Watts or the property damage at Detroit. There was extensive property damage, but you cannot engage in police activities that you cannot carry out. You have to have adequate force. This city, its police department, compared to its Negro population, is much smaller than in a place like Detroit or a place like Newark. The police had to spread out much more here right at the beginning than they did in any of these other places for the reason given. They would have acted to prevent any looting whenever they had adequate manpower at the time and place to do so.

Look at the arrests, here: Two and a half times more arrests here than at Newark, a very firm policy, more than a thousand people arrested for looting. That is a lot of people.

MR. SPIVAK: Gentlemen, we have less than three minutes.

MR. JOHNSON: Mr. Attorney General, this week we have seen another tragic assassination by a man with a rifle. What are the prospects for controlling the sale of firearms in this country, now?

GENERAL CLARK: I have said for a long time, I think they are good. They have to be good. They have got to be better.

MR. JOHNSON: They obviously haven't been good enough.

GENERAL CLARK: These weapons kill people. They are the weapon of the assassin, they can be the weapon of the sniper. We haven't seen much sniping. We could see a lot of sniping. It is imperative that we give an adequate opportunity to the states to protect themselves from people who would illegally, unlawfully, irrationally use firearms. The states have to move, the federal government has to move. I would urge the Congress to enact firearms control legislation that will protect the states from interstate shipment of rifles and pistols and other firearms, immediately.

MR. YETTE: Sir, in answer to a previous question, did I understand you correctly to say that this case will be tried under state rather than federal jurisdiction?

GENERAL CLARK: No decision could be made at this time. I said that deference would be given to the state, if we were convinced that it would proceed and firmly enforce and prosecute. All of the evidence we have at this time—I am convinced at this time that they would do so, that they would like as much as anyone, perhaps more than anyone else in this country, to have an apprehension, to have a prosecution, to have a conviction. I think the State of Tennessee wants this case prosecuted more vigorously than perhaps anyone else.

MR. DRUMMOND: Mr. Attorney General, in Harlem it was reported that hundreds of Negroes went out on the street to produce as much calm as possible and discourage violence. Do you happen to know whether this was an exception or whether it happened in a number of other cities?

GENERAL CLARK: Mr. Drummond, I think it happened in every city where people were pouring onto the streets. I think there are many instances where the old, where the clergy, where the businessmen, and perhaps most important of all, where the very kids themselves, the most vigorous and involved kids themselves, went on the streets and urged peace and urged non-violence, and I think this made a tremendous difference in what happened after this cataclysmic event of Thursday.

MR. SPIVAK: On that note, I think we must end. I am sorry to interrupt, but our time is up.

Thank you, Mr. Attorney General, for being with us today on MEET THE PRESS.