

WH6503-10-7124_scroller

Date: 1965-03-18

Participant: Lyndon B. Johnson

Participant: E. Buford Ellington

Participant: Juanita Roberts

Start Time: 21:13

Place: Oval Office

SCROLLER TITLE: "He Is Absolutely Treacherous"

SCENE SETTER: Less than two weeks after the events of Bloody Sunday in Selma, Alabama, President Johnson spoke with former Tennessee governor E. Buford Ellington, who served as Johnson's liaison with Alabama governor George C. Wallace Jr. Wallace had just escalated his confrontation with the federal government in public remarks that diverged from his private comments to the President made only hours earlier, prompting Johnson to describe Wallace as "absolutely treacherous."

President Johnson: [E.] Buford [Ellington]?

E. Buford Ellington: Yes, sir. I'm sorry I left. I thought you were through.

President Johnson: Well, I thought so, too, but you're dealing with a very treacherous guy [George C. Wallace Jr.], and y'all just must not even come in quoting him anymore.

Ellington: All right.

President Johnson: Because he's a no-good son of a bitch. [*Ellington acknowledges.*] And I think you know it. [*seemingly reading aloud*] "But he announced tonight he would ask Johnson to provide sufficient officers to protect the Negroes. He appeared before the Joint Session, and he says that . . . that 'the federal government . . . They say our courts are too slow,' Wallace said. 'Therefore, we must now submit to mob rule. It's a tragedy and a sorrow beyond words, but the federal judge compounds the anarchy by ordering the state to protect the army.'"

Ellington: Hmm.

President Johnson: "He said tonight that he would ask Johnson to provide protection for Negroes marching from Selma to Montgomery. 'I intend to call on the President of the United States to provide sufficient officers to guarantee the safety and the welfare of citizens in and around the route. The federal government has created this matter; they can help protect it,' Wallace told a televised—"

Juanita Roberts: [*interrupting the call*] [*Unclear.*] No, no. Can you get that open?

President Johnson: Juanita, please get off the phone, honey.

End of excerpt 1.

Ellington: Well, I'm not going to talk to him anymore now. I'm through with him.

President Johnson: Well, you better tell him you're not. Tell him you're not. Tell him you read it on the ticker. And I've been [unclear] since 3:30, [Ellington acknowledges] messing with that son of a bitch, and he is absolutely treacherous.

End of excerpt 2.

Ellington: Well, I told Burke [Marshall] and Lee [C. White] all the way through that I didn't trust him and everything. So I'm just not going to answer any call to him or talk to him. Not till [unclear]—

President Johnson: I'd answer one and just tell him, "Now, listen, George, I offered you—I went over to the President today and told the President that I had talked to you and you wanted help."

Ellington: Yeah.

President Johnson: "He called you and offered to give it to you."

Ellington: Right.

President Johnson: "You ran like a goddamn rabbit. Then you ran down to the television and told them that we had created it, therefore, you're going to ask it. Now, why didn't the hell didn't you stand up like a man and say what you were going to do to begin with?"

Ellington: Well, I'll tell you, that if it's all right with you, I'm not going to answer his call. If he keeps calling me, I'll wait till in the morning where I can record it, see, 'cause I told him all the time, I [unclear]—

President Johnson: Come over here. You can record it anytime.

Ellington: Well, I can record it from here. That's where I been doing it, from my apartment.

President Johnson: That's [unclear].

Ellington: Just went through the, you know . . .

President Johnson: White House.

Ellington: Yeah.

President Johnson: I would do it. I would do it. And I'd talk to him—

Ellington: What I mean, now, he'll start calling me in a few minutes, and I'm just not going to answer him until the morning—

President Johnson: No. I don't think—I don't think—I think you ought to. I think you ought to answer him tonight and just say, "Now, let me tell you, George, I just want this for the record."

Ellington: Good.

President Johnson: "You called me up, asked for help. I offered to give it to you. You ran like a rabbit."

Ellington: That's right. That's right. [*Unclear.*]

President Johnson: “Now, then, you went publicly, and you said this. Now, I want to know whether you mean it or whether you don't, and if you do you, why, you come out there and put it on the record, 'cause I've got [the] record, and I won't—I'm not going to be double-crossed this way.”

Ellington: I will do.

President Johnson: I'm going to issue a statement here that kind of burns his tail, and I'll ask them to call you and give it to you.

Ellington: OK.

President Johnson: [*softly*] All right.

Ellington: Good.

End of excerpt 3.

CITATION: “Lyndon B. Johnson, Buford Ellington, and Juanita Roberts on 18 March 1965,” Conversation WH6503-10-7124, *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition* [Lyndon B. Johnson and Civil Rights, vol. 2, ed. Kent B. Germany] (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014–). URL: <http://prde.upress.virginia.edu/conversations/4005109>