



“Make Them Go Vote for Education”

Date: 1965-03-06

Conversation: WH6503-02-7024-7025

Participant: Lyndon B. Johnson

Participant: Hubert H. Humphrey Jr.

Start Time: 11:25

Duration: 01:53

Place: Mansion

SCENE SETTER: While offering legislative advice to Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey Jr., President Johnson spoke of the connection between education and racial progress—a connection, he said, that should lead Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to lobby for the education bill.

President Johnson: I’ll put the labor unions behind you. George Meany’s labor crowd ought to be there tomorrow morning trying to get people to read and write. I told Martin Luther King [Jr.], I said, “Hell, I’m for voting. And we’re going to get voting. That’s not your problem. You’re going to have a voting message, and it’s an issue that we can do. But . . . The big thing, Dr. King, with you, is a billion, 200 million [dollars] for Negroes only, because who the hell do you think makes less than 2,000 [dollars] a year?”

Hubert H. Humphrey Jr.: Hmm.

President Johnson: It’s the Negroes! Now, by God, they can’t work in a filling station putting water in a radiator unless they can read and write. ’Cause they got to go and punch the cash register, and they don’t know which one to punch. And they got to take a check; they don’t know which one to cash. And they got to take a credit card, and they can’t pull the numbers. So you got to teach them [to] read and write. Now, that’s what you damn fellows better be working on. And if these Republicans want to be for the Negroes—and I hope they do. I want a two-party system. I hope some Negroes vote for Republicans. But you make them go vote for education! And I think you ought to find out this group that’s meeting with Mrs. [Edith L. S.] Green [D–Oregon]. And as Vice President of the United States, you ought to ask two of them to come to your home on Sunday afternoon. You ought to have two of them at breakfast with you on Monday morning. You ought to have two of them in your office in the afternoon, and give them a card to the gallery, and give them a picture of you and your wife [Muriel F. Humphrey], and give them one of the President, and then tell them that this is the greatest thing, and their names are going to be built—be written in fire on every schoolhouse in the country, that they’ve made the breakthrough. And that the Pope don’t get a damn thing out of this but a pencil. And then the School Board’s got to give it to him.

Humphrey: Yes, sir.

President Johnson: And that you're a Protestant, and that this is the best thing you've ever seen. Because if you can't do more than Old Lady Green, [*Humphrey laughs slightly*] I'm in a hell of a shape. I ought to [have] had her [as vice president]!

Humphrey: [*laughing*] Yes, sir, Mr. President.

President Johnson: And if I—she had been a little younger, I might have picked her. Good-bye.

Humphrey: [*laughing*] Good-bye. Thank you.

End of excerpt.

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