

May 13, 1970

MEMORANDUM for Bob Haldeman

FROM THE PRESIDENT

The attached is a memorandum of what actually took place at the Lincoln Memorial.

After you read it, I think you will share my complete frustration with regard to coverage of my activities. I realize we didn't have Ziegler at my elbow every minute or Krogh making notes. If they had been, it would have spoiled the whole thing. On the other hand, while Krogh could not hear it all - apparently his recollection was only of those matters that this memorandum clearly indicates I told the students were not important rather than those matters of the spirit that were important. Ziegler, of course, in his questions wanted to know what time I got up, how long I had been there, what I had for breakfast, etc., all of which were essential to the story but which were completely irrelevant as far as getting across the whole spirit and thrust of the story.

I can understand why John Ehrlichman got the idea from the news reports that I was tired and all I talked about was surfing and nonsensical things. This, of course, reflects on two points -- even when I am tired I do not talk about nonsensical things and also more fundamentally, I am afraid that most of the members of our staff, to their credit, are enormously interested in material things and what we accomplish in our record, etc. etc. but that very few seem to have any interest and, therefore, have no ability to communicate on those matters that are infinitely more important -- qualities of spirit, emotion, of the depth and mystery of life which this whole visit really was all about.

Perhaps it might be well for you, Ehrlichman, Moynihan - maybe Garment, Price, Keogh, Safire and Buchanan to read this. Most of them will not really understand what I am talking about and most of them will disagree with the approach. I realize it would have made more news from the standpoint of the students for me to engage in a spirited "dialogue" with them about why we were in Cambodia, why we haven't ended the war sooner, morality of the war, etc.

This kind of conversation would have been infinitely more easy for me. It would have made more news but as I evaluated the situation this was the one time this group of students - most of whom perhaps were middle class or lower middle class - most of whom were about as poor as I was when I was in college and who had driven all this long distance to Washington -- this was the only time they had ever talked to a President of the United States. They will see me many times discuss these heated, angry subjects that they would hear later at the Monument and that they hear in their classrooms. Perhaps the major contribution I could make to them was to try to lift them a bit out of the miserable intellectual wasteland in which they now wander aimlessly around.

I do not write this memorandum to you critically of our staff because I think it is the best staff any President has had by far in terms of loyalty, willingness to work, etc. The only problem is that we seem to lack on the staff any one individual who really understands or appreciates what I am trying to get across in terms of what a President should mean to the people - not news, not gimmicks like rushing out to the Negro Junior College with a covey of newsreels following. All of this seems to be big stuff and I realize makes big news - perhaps it is. But on the other hand I really wonder in the long run if this is all the legacy we want to leave. If it is - then perhaps we should do our job as easily as we can - as expeditiously as we can and get out and leave the responsibilities of the government to the true materialists -- the socialists, the totalitarians who talk idealism but rule ruthlessly without any regard to the individual considerations - the respect for personality that I tried to emphasize in my dialogue with the students.

As you recall, the press conference was at 10 o'clock Friday night. After the press conference I had approximately 20 calls from VIPs in addition to hundreds from others which I, of course, could not take. I completed returning my calls at approximately 2:15 in the morning. I then went to bed, slept soundly until shortly after four o'clock. When I woke up I got up and went into the Lincoln Sitting Room and was listening to an Ormandy recording with Entremont(?) at the piano playing a Rachmanioff album for piano and orchestra. Manuel apparently heard and came down to the Lincoln Sitting Room and asked if he could get me some coffee or hot chocolate or something else. I told him no but then as I looked out of the window and saw the small knots of students begin to gather on the grounds of the Washington Monument I asked him if he had ever been to the Lincoln Memorial at night.

He said he had not. I said, get your clothes on and we will go down to the Lincoln Memorial. I got dressed and at approximately 4:35 we left the White House and drove to the Lincoln Memorial. I have never seen the Secret Service quite so petrified with apprehension. I insisted, however, that no press be informed and that nobody in our office be informed. Apparently, they disobeyed my instructions on the latter point because Bud Krogh, I understand, and Ron Ziegler showed up toward the end of my meeting with the students.

Manuel and I got out of the car at approximately 4:40 and walked up the steps to the Lincoln statue. I showed him the great inscription above the statue and told him that that, along with the inscription over the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, was, in my opinion, the most moving sight in Washington, and then showed him the Gettysburg Address on the left and Lincoln's Second Inaugural on the right. Manuel was quite familiar with both. While he is a new citizen he is deeply interested in American history and reads it at every opportunity.

By this time a few small groups of students had begun to congregate in the rotunda of the Memorial. I walked over to a group of them and walked up to them and shook hands. They were not unfriendly. As a matter of fact, they seemed somewhat

overawed, and, of course, quite surprised. When I first started to speak to the group there were approximately 8 in it. I asked each of them where they were from and found that over half were from upper New York State. At this point, all of them were men. There were no women. To get the conversation going I asked them how old they were, what they were studying, the usual questions. I asked how many of them had been to Washington before and found that over half the group had never been to Washington before. I told them that it was a beautiful city, that I hoped they enjoyed their visit there, that I wanted them, of course, to attend the anti-war demonstration, to listen to all the speakers; that I hoped they had the time to take a tour of the city and see some of the historical monuments.

I told them that my favorite spot in all of Washington was right where we were standing -- the Lincoln Memorial at night -- that I had not been here at night for ten years, that I had come down here because I had awakened early after my press conference and wanted Manuel to see this wonderful sight.

Two or three of them volunteered that they had not been able to hear the press conference because they had been driving all night in order to get here. I said I was sorry they had missed it because I had tried to explain in the press conference that my goals in Vietnam were the same as theirs - to stop the killing and end the war to bring peace. Our goal was not to get into Cambodia by what we were doing but to get out of Vietnam.

They did not respond and so I took it from there by saying that I realized that most of them would not agree with my position but I hoped that they would not allow their disagreement on this issue to lead them to fail to give us a hearing on some other issues where we might agree. And also particularly I hoped that their hatred of the war, which I could well understand, would not turn into a bitter hatred of our whole system, our country and everything that it stood for. I said, I know that probably most of you think I'm an S.O.B. but I want you to know that I understand just how you feel. I recall that when I was just a little older than you, right out of law school and ready to get married, how excited I was when Chamberlain came home from Munich and made his famous statement about peace in our time. I had heard it on the radio. I had so little in those days that the prospect of going into the service was almost unbearable and I felt that the United States staying out of any kind of a conflict was worth paying any price whatever. As I pointed out too the fact that I came from a Quaker background I was

as close to being a pacifist as anybody could be in those times and as a result I thought at that time that Chamberlain was the greatest man alive, and when I read Churchill's all-out criticism of Chamberlain I thought Churchill was a madman. In retrospect, I now realize I was wrong. I think now that Chamberlain was a good man but that Churchill was a wiser man and that we in the world are better off than we would be because Churchill had not only the wisdom but the courage to carry out the policies that he believed were right even though there was a time when both in England and all over the world he was extremely unpopular because of his "anti-peace" stand.

I then tried to move the conversation into areas where I could draw them out. I said that since some of them had come to Washington for the first time I hoped that while they were young that they would never miss an opportunity to travel. One of them said that he didn't know whether he could afford it, and I said I didn't think I could afford it either when I was young but my wife and I borrowed the money for a trip we took to Mexico and then one to Central America. The fact is, you must travel when you are young. If you wait until you can afford it you will be too old to enjoy it. When you're young you can enjoy it. I urged them to start with the United States. I said there was so much to see in this country. I told them that as they went West, that I particularly thought they should go to places like Santa Fe, New Mexico and see American Indians. I pointed out that I knew that on their campuses that the major subject of concern was the Negro problem. I said this was altogether as it should be because of the degradation of slavery that had been imposed upon the Negroes and it would be impossible for us to do everything that we should do to right that wrong, but I pointed out that what we have done with the American Indians was in its way just as bad. We had taken a proud and independent race and virtually destroyed them, and that we had to find ways to bring them back into decent lives in this country.

I said along the same lines that they would find in California that the Mexican-Americans were even from an economic standpoint worse off than the Negroes. I said that in both cases we needed to open channels of communication to Indians, to Mexicans as well as to Negroes, and I hoped that they would do so.

At that time a girl joined the group and since I had been discussing California I asked if anybody there was from California. She spoke up and said she was from Los Altos and I said that was one of my favorite towns in Northern California and I hoped it was as beautiful as I remembered it. She did not respond.

In trying to draw her out, I told the rest of the group that when they went to California that they would see there what massive strides we could take to deal with the problem of the environment which I knew they were all interested in. I said that right below where I live in California there was the greatest surfing beach in the world, that it was completely denied to the public due to the fact that it was Marine Corps property, and that I had taken steps to release some of this property to the public for a public beach so that the terribly overcrowded beaches further north could be unburdened, and so that the people could have a chance to enjoy the natural beauty which was there. I said that one of the thrusts of our whole quality of life environmental program was to take our Government property and put it to better uses and not simply to continue to use it for military or other purposes because it had been used for that way from time immemorial.

Most of them seemed to nod in agreement when I made this point.

I then spoke of how I hoped that they would have the opportunity to know not only the United States but the whole world. I said most people will tell you to go to Europe. I said Europe was fine, but it's really an older version of America. It is worth seeing but the place that I felt they would particularly enjoy visiting would be Asia. I told them my great hopes that during my Administration, and certainly during their lifetime, that the great mainland of China would be opened up so that we could know the 700 million people who live in China who are one of the most remarkable people on earth.

Most of them seemed to nod in agreement when I made this point.

I then went on to say, however, that they should not overlook when they were in Asia the people of India. I said the people in India are terribly poor, but they have a history and philosophical background and a mystique which they should try to understand.

I also touched lightly on places like Malaysia. One of them mentioned that we had a Peace Corps in Malaysia and I said, that's right, we have them in several of these countries wherever they will allow it.

I then moved on to the Soviet Union. Then one of them asked me what Moscow was like, and I said gray. It's very important if you go to Russia, of course, to see it because of the historical and governmental operations that are there, but if you really want to know Russia, its exciting variety and history you must go to Leningrad. I said that in Russia Leningrad was really a more interesting place to visit, that the people were really more outgoing there since they were not so much under control and domination of the central government.

I also said that in terms of beautiful cities that they would find Prague and Warsaw of much more architectural beauty than Moscow. I made this point because I was speaking directly to one of the students who said he was a student of architecture. In fact, there were two who said they were studying architecture and I thought that they would be interested in knowing about ----- but the most important point I made about Russia, was that as you went across the country, that they should go to places like Novosibirsk, a raw, new city in the heart of Siberia and Samarkand in Asian Russia where the people were Asians rather than Russians.

One of them asked whether it would be possible to get a visa to such cities, and I said I was sure they could and if any of them took a trip to Russia and wanted to contact my office I would help out.

This seemed to get a little chuckle from them.

I then moved back to the problem and my thrust then of what really mattered in the world was people rather than cities and air and water and all the other things that were material. I said, for example, Haiti of all the countries I have visited in Latin America is probably the poorest with Bolivia slightly poorer, but that the Haitians, as I recalled from 1955, while they were poor had a dignity and a grace which was very moving, that I always had wanted to return, not because there was anything in Haiti worth seeing in terms of cities or good food, etc., but because the people had such character.

I then made this same point again with regard to the people I had seen in Asia and India and returned again to the United States where I again emphasized the importance of their not becoming alienated from the people of this country, its great variety.

I expressed distress that on the college campuses the blacks and whites, while they now go to school together have less contact with each other than they had when they weren't going to school together on some of our major campuses. This seemed to get through, although none of them had much to say and none of them responded specifically.

By this time the group around me had begun to get considerably larger. I would say that the original group of approximately 8 to 10 had now become perhaps 30 and some of those who seemed to be more leader types and older began to take part in the conversation.

One spoke up and said, "I hope you realize that we are willing to die for what we believe in."

I said I certainly realize that. Do you realize that many of us when we were your age were also willing to die for what we believed in and were willing to do so today. The point is that we were trying to build a world in which you will not have to die for what you believe in, in which you are able to live for. I put in one brief comment with regard to the point I had made in the press conference that while we had great differences with the Russians we had to find a way to limit nuclear arms and I had hoped that we could make some progress in that direction. They seemed to have very little interest in that subject. Perhaps it was because we moved through so fast and perhaps because they were overawed by the whole incident.

Then another spoke up and said, we are not interested in what Prague looks like. We are interested in what kind of life we build in the United States.

I said the whole purpose of my discussing Prague and other places was not to discuss the city but the people. For the next 25 years the world is going to get much smaller. We are going to be living in all parts of the world and it is vitally important that you know and appreciate and understand people every place, wherever they are, and particularly understand the people in your own country.

I said I know that the great emphasis that is currently being put on the environment -- the necessity to have clean air, clean water, clean streets -- that, as you know, we have a very bold program going further than any program has ever gone before to deal with some of these subjects, but I want to leave

just one thought with you, that cleaning up the air and the water and the streets is not going to solve the deepest problems that concern us all. Those are material problems. They must be solved. They are terribly important. We must have clean air and clean water. We must make the country more beautiful and remove the ugly blotches that our modern society has put on the face of the earth. But you must remember that something that is completely clean can also be completely sterile and without spirit. What we all must think about is why we are here. What are those elements of the spirit which really matter. And, here again, I returned to my theme of thinking about people rather than about places and about things. I said candidly and honestly that I didn't have the answer, but I knew that young people today were searching as I was searching 40 years ago for an answer to this problem. I just wanted to be sure that all of them realized that ending the war and cleaning up the streets and the air and the water was not going to solve spiritual hunger which all of us have and which, of course, has been the great mystery of life from the beginning of time.

The last 20 minutes of the conversation Manuel made mention to me a couple of times that I had a telephone call in the car. I, of course, smiled and said, let it wait. I realized that the Secret Service were becoming more and more concerned as they saw the crowd begin to mount and probably feared that some of the more active leaders would get word of my visit and descend upon us. By this time the dawn was upon us, the first rays of the sun began to show and they began to climb up over the Washington Monument and I said I had to go and shook hands with those nearest to me and walked down the steps.

A bearded fellow from Detroit was taking a picture as I began to get in the car. I asked him if he wouldn't like to get in the picture. He stepped over with me and I said, look, I'll have the President's doctor take the picture, and Tkach took the picture. He seemed to be quite delighted -- it was, in fact, the broadest smile that I saw on the entire visit. As I left him I said, I came back to the theme I had made up above, and I knew he had come a long way for this event and I knew, too, that he and his colleagues were terribly frustrated and angry about our policy and opposed to it. I said, I just hope your opposition doesn't turn into a blind hatred of the country. But remember this is a great country with all of its faults. I said, if you have any doubt about it go down to the passport office and you won't see many people lining up to get out of the country. Abroad, you will see a number lining up to get in.

He smiled and took it all in good humor. We shook hands, I got into the car and drove away. From there I asked the driver to take us up to the Capitol. Manuel had never been in the Capitol before - I took him for a tour of the House side, the Senate side, the Rotunda where I told him the services for President Eisenhower and Senator Dirksen had been conducted.

Finally, we found a fellow by the name of Frazer (Fraser) who said he had come to the Congress the same year I did in 1947 as a page boy for Charlie Halleck. Frazer who had the morning shift and opened the House Chamber to us. We walked in with the Secret Service men, Tkach -- I had Manuel go up and sit in the Speaker's Chair. We all clapped as he got into the chair.

When we left we tried to find some place to see if we could have breakfast down there and, of course, nothing was available. Several of the Negro women who do the cleaning came up to speak to me. Three of them had known me when I was there as Vice President. One of them asked me to sign her Bible. I told her that it made me very proud to sign her Bible and I was glad to see that she carried it with her but that the trouble is that most of us these days didn't read it enough. She said, I read it all the time. After I signed her Bible she went down and brought up two or three others who were working on the cleaning detail for signing of pictures and other odds and ends that they had for their children, grandchildren, etc.

We then left the Capitol and went down to the Mayflower restaurant. I hadn't been in a public restaurant in Washington since becoming President except, of course, on official functions. They were all delighted to see us and I had corn beef hash and poached egg for the first time in five years, and at the conclusion signed autographs for everybody in the restaurant. I found, incidentally, almost without exception, individually the waitresses were for what I had said, what we were doing in Cambodia. As we drove away from the restaurant, eight to ten of the waitresses all stood at the door, outside on the street and waved goodbye.