WENDELL BERGE
ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL

Department of Justice
Washington

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

I am sure that you have noticed reports of the outrageous lynching at Sikeston, Missouri about two weeks ago. Lynchings in the past have been considered primarily a local problem. It seems to me, however, that at the present time such a horrible example of racial conflict is of grave national concern and is deeply involved with the international situation. The Japanese are said to be using this episode in short-wave broadcasting to the East Indies as an indication of what the black population may expect if the democracies win. Obviously, also, this type of mob action furnishes important ammunition to the propagandists who are presently engaged in efforts to stir up our own population along racial lines.

It if seems advisable to you from a policy standpoint to investigate this lynching, I think that ample basis exists for making an investigation. It is said that the local authorities made very little real effort to protect the victim, and that there would have been ample time to have prevented the lynching if vigorous action had been taken. I do not know whether it would be possible to make a case under Sections 51 or 52 of Title 18, U.S.C.A., but we could surely try, and there is certainly enough in the reports which we have received to indicate that an investigation would not be inappropriate.

Of course we would have to consider what the attitude of the State authorities in Missouri might be if the Federal Government were to go into the matter. However, I should think that a letter to the Governor might justify our investigation. I have prepared a memorandum of directions to the Director of the Bureau of Investigation which I shall sign if you approve it. I have also prepared a letter for your signature to the Governor of Missouri. I shall be glad to get your reaction to this matter.

As approved
2-11-42

Wendell Berge

WENDELL BERGE
Assistant Attorney General