

Mr. Hubbard
Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
FROM :
SUBJECT: DIRECTOR, FBI

DATE: February 29, 1956

UNKNOWN SUBJECTS
LEROY COLLINS, ET AL - VICTIMS
CIVIL RIGHTS

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MAR 1 1956
CIVIL RIGHTS SECTION

On the afternoon of February 28, 1956, I was visited by a delegation of six members of the National Council of Negro Women, headed by Mrs. William Thomas Mason, President. This is the same group which called upon you early in December, 1955. After making a few preliminary comments, Mrs. Mason called upon Mrs. Juanita Mitchell, the Chairman of the Legal Committee of the National Council of Negro Women. Mrs. Mitchell is the wife of Clarence Mitchell, Director of the Washington Bureau of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Mrs. Mitchell asserted that when they called upon you last December they were concerned about the failure of the Department of Justice and the FBI to take action in the abduction and murder of Emmett Louis Till. Mrs. Mitchell then asserted that during the state trial of the two individuals arrested for the murder of young Till, Sheriff Strider had confined two important witnesses, Leroy Collins and Henry Lee Logan, also known as Henry Lee Loggins, in the Tallahatchie County jail at Charleston, Mississippi. She stated that these facts were revealed to three representatives of the Negro press, including Jim Hicks, then of Afro-American and now of the New Amsterdam Press, and an individual named Farnsworth of Jackson, Mississippi, and two white reporters, one of whom she identified as representing the Memphis Press-Scimitar, at a 3:00 a.m. meeting by Dr. T. R. M. Howard of Mound Bayou, Mississippi.

Mrs. Mitchell further asserted that the woman who cooked at the jail had seen the two witnesses in jail on the morning preceding the 3:00 a.m. conference and that these facts were reported to the Special Prosecutor appointed by Governor White from Ripley, Mississippi. (The Prosecutor is Robert B. Smith III, a former Special Agent of the FBI.)

Mrs. Mitchell further stated that she had presented these facts to you in December and that you had sent them around to confer with me. At that time, I was out of the office. Mr. Nichols saw the delegation but they declined to furnish him any information.

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Received
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AAG Criminal

THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

Mrs. Mitchell became somewhat emotional and stated that they desired to know why the complainant had never been interviewed. She stated the complainant, Jim Hicks, would get on a plane and come to Washington immediately. She likewise stated that Dr. Howard had not been questioned about this. Mrs. Mitchell was quite emotional on this matter, and I accordingly told her that I would have a check made to see if the facts had ever been reported to the Bureau. I saw no point to be served in pursuing this matter further with Mrs. Mitchell in view of the emotional state in which she was. I did tell the ladies that the preliminary facts on the Till case had been considered by the Department; that there was no violation of Federal law involved in the Till case and that this had been the subject of discussion at your staff conferences.

For your information, Mr. Olney referred to the Bureau by memorandum dated September 30, 1955, the communication which you had received from Mr. J. Francis Pohlhaus, Counsel, Washington Bureau of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, enclosing a newspaper clipping from the September 20, 1955, edition of the Afro-American reflecting that the two above-mentioned witnesses had been placed in jail to prevent their testifying. It was pointed out that if this were a fact, this would be a violation of Section 242, Title 18, United States Code.

We accordingly checked into the matter to determine if there was a Federal violation involved. On October 14, 1955, we referred to the Criminal Division a report of our Memphis office which reflected that on September 20, 1955, court was recessed in an effort to allow the prosecution to locate Collins and Logan, and that the Prosecuting Attorney had come into possession of a rumor that Collins and Logan were confined to the jail at Charleston, Mississippi. An immediate check was made by the state authorities with negative results. Sheriff Strider was questioned by Special Prosecutor Smith. He denied that Collins or Logan were confined in jail. The state authorities contacted Governor White, Attorney General Coleman, Colonel Birdsong, Commissioner of Public Safety and the District Attorney at Indianola, Mississippi. Representatives of the Mississippi Highway Patrol were dispatched to the jail at Charleston, Mississippi, where they searched the jail and interviewed each prisoner concerning Collins and Logan and reported that neither Collins nor Logan was being held in the jail at Charleston, Mississippi.

THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

In the meantime, the Tri-State Defender, Memphis, Tennessee, carried a copyrighted article dated October 8, 1955, written by L. Alex Wilson, wherein was published a question and answer statement of Collins taken by Euclid L. Taylor, General Counsel of the Chicago Defender. In this statement Collins denied he was in jail. He stated that during the trial he was at Clarksdale, Mississippi, with Henry Loggins. He denied any knowledge of the killing of the Till boy and denied he had ever talked to Loggins about the Till boy being killed. A copy of the clipping appearing in the Tri-State Defender of October 8, 1955, was transmitted to the Criminal Division with our report of October 14, 1955.

James I. Hicks wrote an open letter to the Attorney General and the Director of the FBI which appeared in the Baltimore Afro-American on November 19, 1955. This open letter purports to tell how the killers of the Till boy could be identified and makes the assertion that Collins and Loggins were taken to the Charleston jail. Hicks in this open letter also refers to a woman "named Sarah," serving a life term for killing another woman, who cooked at the jail, and stated if Sarah could be made to talk, she could tell that during the trial when Sheriff H. C. Strider was saying he could not locate Collins that actually Collins was locked up in the Charleston jail. A copy of this open letter as it appeared in the Baltimore Afro-American was transmitted to the Criminal Division under date of December 6, 1955. By memorandum dated October 21, 1955, Mr. Olney advised that no further investigation was desired.

These facts are being called to your attention with the request the Bureau be advised if it is the desire of the Department that any additional investigation be conducted. I would appreciate prompt advice as I agreed to inform Mrs. Mason of the results of my inquiries and I would like to do this without delay.

cc: Mr. William P. Rogers
Deputy Attorney General

cc: Assistant Attorney General _____
Warren Olney III