Office of the Attorney General
Washington, D.C.

December 11, 1942

1144-41-8

Dear Mr. President:

Howard Wash, a Negro, was lynched on October 17th, at Laurel, Mississippi, though convicted of murder by a jury and punished by life imprisonment.

Investigation, which I ordered the next day, indicates that the state jailor wilfully denied Wash the equal protection of the laws and that the mob counseled and induced that offense in violation of the federal conspiracy statute. The jailor's failure, either through cowardice or connivance, to turn a key in a lock sent Wash to his death. One mobster has confessed; others are believed identifiable.

The state grand jury refused to indict, and no further state effort to prosecute is anticipated.

I have today authorized presentation to a federal grand jury early in January. I am appointing as my Special Assistant for this purpose a Mississippi attorney who enjoys the confidence of the Governor and people of that state.

No federal indictment in a lynching case has heretofore been maintained. The present effort will be confidently and vigorously prosecuted.

No publication should be allowed until I further advise you.

Respectfully,

Francis Biddle

FRANCIS BIDDLE
Attorney General

FILE

The President,

The White House