

NJ- Civil Rights

FROM: Office of the Governor

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 9, 1965

STATEMENT BY GOVERNOR RICHARD J. HUGHES

This nation is One Nation under God only because its diverse elements are linked spiritually and physically in one single indivisible unit. Therefore, what happens to American citizens in Alabama must concern citizens in New Jersey.

As Governor of a sovereign State I have made it my policy not to comment on the internal affairs of other states. What is happening in Alabama today is not an internal affair, but one which has shaken the Nation and the world. We are not, therefore, talking about any nebulous concept of "States' Rights," but events which challenge the very idea of sovereign democracy throughout the Nation.

We are witnessing in Alabama a blatant denial of a basic American right. Democracy is absolutely meaningless if it is separated from the right to vote.

It mocks the true meaning of America to turn away Negro American citizens who want nothing more than what each one of us expects as his due and birthright, namely, the right to vote.

This Nation was born in a revolution which sought to achieve political representation. It engaged in a bloody civil war to guarantee that no American would ever again be treated as a piece of property, but as the human repository of a Divine spark. Two great wars around the globe were fought to make the world safe for democracy - and yet democracy is challenged in Alabama today.

I am convinced that I speak for the vast majority of the people of New Jersey when I say that we condemn the denial to American citizens of the right to vote and we support their peaceful efforts to achieve this American right. We urge our fellow Americans in Alabama, White and Negro alike, to make their voices heard and protest this destruction of the American ideal.

I have requested the Attorney General of the United States to use all available means of federal intervention, including the use of United States marshals, to rectify this continuing wrong. I have requested New Jersey's members of Congress to support federal legislation necessary to assure the right to vote for all Americans in all the states.

Americans all, no matter whether they live in New Jersey or Alabama, are bound in conscience to the words of our martyred President, John F. Kennedy:

"This Nation *** for all its boasts and all its hopes will not be free until all its citizens are free.***"

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Following is the text of a telegram sent today to United States Attorney General Nicholas DeB Katzenbach:

"In view of the brutal denial to Negro American citizens of Alabama of the fundamental right to register and vote, I urge you to use all available means of Federal intervention, including the use of United States Marshals, in Alabama to insure democracy and protect the lives of those who are peacefully seeking to share our common American birthright - the right to vote. I am also recommending to the New Jersey Congressional delegation that it give its strongest support to new legislation which would enable the appointment of Federal voting registrars in any area of the country where a denial of voting rights is evident. I know that as a fellow New Jerseyan I will be proud of your action in these difficult times, as I always have been.

Richard J. Hughes
Governor of New Jersey"

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