



HEROES & VILLAINS

King & civil rights > After his death

Source 6a

Extracts from a British Embassy dispatch sent to London from Washington, 10 April 1968, reporting on the atmosphere in New York
(Catalogue ref: FCO 7/860)

1. On Monday, 8 April, Mayor Lindsay proclaimed the day of the funeral as a day of mourning in New York City. Municipal offices, schools, banks, commodities exchanges and, for the first time for a private citizen, the New York and American Stock Exchanges were all closed. Many commercial firms also closed for the day of the funeral or, like most of the large retail stores, did not open until the afternoon. The seamen and longshoremen, who had already stopped work for a day on Friday in honour of Dr. King, also stayed away on Tuesday. Photographs of Dr. King stood in many shop windows and a number of firms bought substantial space in the papers to record their tributes. The Mayor also proclaimed that flags (which had already been flying at half-mast since Friday) should continue to be flown at half-mast for thirty days after the funeral on all City buildings and public places and that mourning bunting should be displayed at City Hall.

12. During the period including the day of Dr. King's funeral many sporting events were postponed and several Museums were closed. On Tuesday itself many memorial services and meetings were held and in Central Park some 5,000 people attended a concert of solemn music given at the Mayor's request by Leopold Stokowski with the American Symphony Orchestra and two choirs - the performers all gave their services without a fee.



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13. As in most of the cities with sizeable negro populations the last five days since the assassination have been ones of palpable fear and tension for both black and white in New York City. At night the streets were almost deserted, the greater part of the population choosing to remain indoors, many no doubt glued to their television sets or radios to hear the latest reports on the situation both in this City and elsewhere in the United States and to listen to the daily talks or interviews given by Mayor Lindsay. The tensest day was probably the day following the assassination when a crop of wild and baseless rumours about outbreaks of violence in the City drove many people home and caused many firms to let their employees leave an hour or so earlier than usual. After the funeral had taken place on Tuesday there was a noticeable lessening of tension and once again the evening throngs began to return to the streets.

15. It is difficult to tell how far Dr. King's assassination has really caused a change of heart or promoted deeper understanding of the negro viewpoint among that large segment of the decent, but all too complacent, section of the white population who have hitherto seen no urgent need for action in the racial field. Some will no doubt have seen the light. But resentment at the looting and burning in so many American cities is likely to have stiffened the attitude of others, while others yet again, happily congratulating themselves that New York managed to come through the last five days so well without recourse to the National Guard or the Army, may be content to trust blindly that Mayor Lindsay will continue to stand between them and any major racial outburst.