



## “We Got Three Kids Missing”

**Date:** 1964-06-23  
**Conversation:** WH6406-14-3836  
**Participant:** Lyndon B. Johnson  
**Participant:** James O. Eastland  
**Start Time:** 15:59  
**Duration:** 03:43  
**Place:** Oval Office

SCENE SETTER: When news broke of the disappearance of three civil rights workers in Mississippi, President Johnson called Sen. James O. “Jim” Eastland [D–Mississippi], the powerful chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee. As an arch-segregationist, Eastland dismissed the disappearance as a “publicity stunt” and assured Johnson there was “nobody in that area to harm them.”

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**President Johnson:** [*answering on speakerphone*] Jim?

**James O. “Jim” Eastland:** Hello, Mr. President, how you feel?

**President Johnson:** I’m doing all right. I hope you are. You got a lot of sunshine down there?

**Eastland:** Need some rain—we need rain mighty bad.

**President Johnson:** Well, we’re so dry in my country that we’re going to have to sell off all of our cattle if we don’t get rain.

**Eastland:** Well, I’m in the same shape: got a cotton crop just burning up.

**President Johnson:** I’ll be darned. I thought you’d be harvesting cotton pretty soon. When is it, July?

**Eastland:** Yeah.

**President Johnson:** I guess they’re harvesting the valley right now.

**Eastland:** Uh-huh.

**President Johnson:** Jim, we got three kids missing down there. What can I do about it?

**Eastland:** Well, I don’t know. I don’t believe there’s—I don’t believe there’s three missing.

**President Johnson:** We got their parents down here.

**Eastland:** I believe it's a publicity stunt.

**President Johnson:** They say that their parents are here, and they've come down to see the Attorney General [Robert F. "Bobby" Kennedy], and they've seen Burke Marshall, and they're going to be interviewed by the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation]—the parents. And they've got some newspaper people and some photographers with them and couple of congressmen: Congressman [William Fitts] Ryan [D–New York] and this Republican, Congressman Ogden [R.] Reid [R–New York], whose folks used to own the *Herald Tribune* in New York.

**Eastland:** Yeah?

**President Johnson:** They want to come to the White House, see the President, and I told them that I thought that that would be better to let Lee [C.] White—who handles matters like that for me—talk to them, and he'd go up to Ryan's office and talk to them. I don't know whether that's going to be satisfactory or not.

*End of excerpt 1.*

**Eastland:** Now, I'm going to tell you why I don't think there's a damn thing to it. They were put in jail in Philadelphia, in East Mississippi, right next to . . . county right next to John [C.] Stennis's [D–Mississippi] home county, and they were going to Meridian. There's not a Ku Klux Klan in that area; there's not a Citizens' Council in that area; there's no organized white man in that area. So that's why I think it's a publicity stunt. Now, if it had happened in other areas, I would pay more attention to it, but I happen to know that some of these bombings where nobody gets hurt are publicity stunts.

This Nigra woman [Fannie Lou Hamer] in Ruleville [Mississippi] that's been to Washington and testified that she was shot at 19 times is lying. 'Course, with anybody that gets shot at 19 times [*slight chuckle*] is going to get hit, and she hasn't been shot at a time, and nobody's tried to bother her. They let her sit in on the Democratic . . . in the Democratic county convention this morning.

**President Johnson:** Uh-huh.

**Eastland:** I don't think there's anything to it.

*End of excerpt 2.*

**Eastland:** [*speaking over President Johnson*] Let me ask you this question about these three that are missing: Who is there to harm them? There's no organ—there's no White organizations in that area of Mississippi. Who would—could possibly harm them?

**President Johnson:** Well, might have some crank or some nut, like they locked [*Eastland attempts to interject*] a man up in Minneapolis [Minnesota] today for saying he's going to kill me Friday when I go out there.

**Eastland:** It'll take a crowd to handle—make three men disappear.

**President Johnson:** Well, it depends on the kind of men, Jim.

**Eastland:** Huh?

**President Johnson:** It depends on the kind of men.

**Eastland:** Well, there's nobody in that area to harm them.

**President Johnson:** They might take a big crowd to take three like you.

**Eastland:** [*chuckling*] Ah, well—

**President Johnson:** I imagine it wouldn't take many to capture me.

**Eastland:** [*continuing to chuckle*] Well, I'd run.

**President Johnson:** All right. Well, now, you get that rain for both of us and send it on east when you get through using it.

*End of excerpt 3.*

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