

My store was broken into and severely looted on the night of April 5, 1968, but I reopened with the determination that all small businessmen have to continue to serve their neighborhood and to make a living as best they can.

On the nights of May 3 and 4 after closing hours, my store was again attacked by neighborhood teenagers. On each of these occasions, the police were present for some or all of the time during the break-ins. Each time the police had the opportunity to arrest and capture the very few individuals involved, but each time they refused to do so. The only explanation given to me by these Fifth Precinct officers on the scene was that this no-arrest policy was imposed by the House District Committee.

I am white and my business neighborhood is Negro and white. My neighbors of both races implored me to write you this letter to explain the dangerous situation that exists. It is not "black power" militants who threaten our neighborhood and, most especially, my sole livelihood, but teenage criminals. My neighbors and I are frightened. It is they who call the police when my store has been broken into. The police only tell me to get a gun and to write to the District Committee.

Mr. McMillan, I am a veteran and a peace-loving man. I can use a gun, but must I stay in my store all night with gun in hand and kill someone when a concentrated police surveillance and a few arrests of easily identifiable culprits would solve the problem at my store?

As a life-long Democrat and a D.C. small businessman, I beg you to use your good offices to contact the metropolitan police and, most especially, the Fifth Precinct to help give me and my neighbors the protection we must have to survive. The tax base of the District of Columbia cannot long survive if the small businessmen of this city are destroyed.

I thank you for any response or help you can give me in this life-and-death struggle for economic survival that I face.

Yours truly,

CHARLES GOTKIN.

SILVER SPRING, Md., May 7, 1968.

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,
The White House,
Washington, D.C.

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT: My husband is the owner, or should I say was the owner, of a small liquor store in the District of Columbia. He and I worked side by side for several years, starting from scratch since we did not have much financial backing at this time which was around 1955. For the past seven years, I have not worked in the store but have worked for the U.S. Public Health Service, after our store was held up about three times and my husband felt that he did not want to endanger both of our lives with children to raise and put through college.

Things have been going along relatively smooth for the past seven years, except for a break-in or two (for which we were not covered since insurance coverage was not available after the previous holdups) and window glass having to be repaired because of vandalism in the neighborhood. However, April 5, 1968, was our downfall—we were warned by neighborhood friends to close our store around 1:30 p.m. and leave immediately, which my husband did. About 2:30 p.m. our store was broken into, looted, in fact cleaned out, and what was not taken by the mob was broken and stepped on. Our safe, into which we had put several checks cashed that morning and accumulated cash, was dragged outside of the store with chains tied to a car. The safe was literally chopped apart with a sledge hammer and everything taken, even things that could not possibly have been of any use to the culprits.

It is now May 7th and we still are not back in business. The insurance adjustor assigned to our case needed several figures in order to ascertain our loss and these figures were not readily available due to the fact that everything including records was destroyed or trampled on.

Our biggest problem at the present time, besides knowing how we will come out in the end financially, is trying to decide whether or not to go back into the business again. As you must know by this time, several merchants who have reopened have been threatened for protection money, looted and broken into again, put afire, and even held up at gunpoint. We feel the Inner City is not a safe place to make our living in as the District of Columbia Government's police power has literally surrendered to mob rule, as far as we can ascertain. Unless police power is restored, the small business owners in the District face serious financial hardship. In spite of its Mayor and City Council, Washington, D.C., is still the