

6-2016

# The Endless Long Hot Summer: A study of Urban Riots and the Kerner Report

Taylor Anderson

*Union College - Schenectady, NY*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalworks.union.edu/theses>



Part of the [Politics and Social Change Commons](#), [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#), [Social History Commons](#), and the [Urban Studies Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Anderson, Taylor, "The Endless Long Hot Summer: A study of Urban Riots and the Kerner Report" (2016). *Honors Theses*. 115.  
<https://digitalworks.union.edu/theses/115>

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at Union | Digital Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Union | Digital Works. For more information, please contact [digitalworks@union.edu](mailto:digitalworks@union.edu).

The Endless Long Hot Summer:  
A Study of Urban Riots and The Kerner Report

By

Taylor Anderson

\* \* \* \* \*

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for  
Honors in the Department of History

UNION COLLEGE

June, 2016

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	iii
Chapter One: A Literature Review.....	1
Chapter Two: Racism and Urban Violence.....	12
Chapter Three: The Police and Minorities.....	33
Chapter Four: The Media and Urban Violence.....	58
Chapter Five: Conclusion.....	74
Bibliography.....	82

## ABSTRACT

ANDERSON, TAYLOR

The Endless Long Hot Summer: A Study of Urban Riots and The Kerner Report

This thesis examines the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders' (Kerner Commission) investigation from 1967 to 1968 of the urban violence that occurred throughout the late 1960s in the United States. The study focuses on the process by which the Kerner Commission's research and investigation became the conclusions and recommendations found in the *Final Report* they produced. For purposes of analysis, three sections of the commission's research and findings were examined—the relationships between urban violence and racism, the police and minorities, and the press and urban violence. The commission's methodology was a combination of investigative fieldwork that included interviews and attitude surveys with African American communities, social science research, and direct testimonies from over one hundred and thirty witnesses.

The Kerner Commission's *Final Report* was well received by the media but quickly became controversial within academic and political circles. Generally, the *Report's* reception can be characterized as too liberal for Conservatives and too conservative for liberals. In evaluating the culmination of the commission's findings and recommendations into their *Final Report*, this thesis demonstrates several reasons why their investigation may not have produced the result many expected it to. The commission knew from the beginning that in order for their *Report* to have any influence that it would need to be generally accepted by the public and government. Producing a document that advocated for radical reforms would detract from the general acceptability of their recommendations. An important factor was the

context in which the *Report* was to be published. In 1968, Johnson was increasingly becoming more unpopular and the political climate was unstable. The President was not in a position to endorse a policy agenda that advocated for increased federal spending or the restructuring of major American institutions. Therefore, the Johnson administration attempted to limit the scope of the recommendations that the commission put forth.

Lastly, while the *Report* is criticized for being inconsistent as a result of the strong moralistic introduction that precludes largely broad and abstract recommendations, this study argues that the commission's inclusion of the introduction was done deliberately. The commission relied on the introduction to convey the spirit of their investigation without forcing the *Report* to endorse specific recommendations. By concentrating on attitudinal change within society, the commission focused on individuals rather than the failure of the Johnson administration and American institutions.

“If the soul is left in the darkness, sins will be committed. The guilty one is not he who commits the sin, but he who causes the darkness.” This statement originally made by Victor Hugo was quoted by Martin Luther King, Jr. in his testimony heard by the Kerner Commission in late 1967. Dr. King was alluding to the dismal state of race relations in late 1960s American society. The frustration of black America with racial discrimination and oppression culminated in the urban disturbances that erupted throughout major cities in the United States in the late 1960s. The riots captured the nation’s attention; they were collective violence that affected American society as a whole. In addition to public concern, major American institutions such as the government, the media and law enforcement could no longer deny that some action had to be taken. In response to these riots, President Lyndon Baines Johnson created the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, also known as the Kerner Commission, on July 28, 1967. President Johnson gave them the task of answering three important questions regarding the urban riots, “What happened? Why did it happen? And what can be done to prevent it from happening again?”<sup>1</sup>

In the months after its formation the Kerner Commission met for forty-four days, completed field work in twenty-three cities, conducted 1,200 interviews, attitude surveys and other serious studies of conditions, and heard the testimony of one hundred and thirty witnesses. Although they knew their findings would be controversial they felt their answer was clear—“Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal.”<sup>2</sup> They felt that “great sustained national efforts were required to combat racism, unemployment and poverty.”<sup>3</sup> The Commission released its final report to the public, a 426-page document

---

<sup>1</sup> Fred R. Harris, Otto Kerner, and the United States Kerner Commission. *The Kerner Report: The 1968 Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 1-29.

<sup>2</sup> Harris, et al., Preface.

<sup>3</sup> Harris, et al., Preface.

consisting of seventeen chapters documenting their findings and policy recommendations, in February of 1968.

The report received extensive media coverage and reactions were mixed. The most notable reaction was from the Johnson administration. The President and the White House refused to accept the Commission's findings or implement any of their policy recommendations based on their dissatisfaction with the *Report's* findings.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, the negative reaction of influential policy makers, such as the President and his administration, affected the trajectory and influence of the report. However, the *Report* was a benchmark in race relations and discussions regarding racial equality and policy in the United States. An examination of the riots themselves, the primary causes, the Kerner Commission's research investigation and the conclusions found in the *Final Report* are important criteria to consider when assessing not only the relevance of the findings but also the sufficiency of their conclusions.

Analysis of the Kerner Commission's information gathering processes illustrates that the transmission of these major ideas about the relationships between racism and urban violence, police brutality and minorities, and the press and riots into a *Final Report* was a difficult progression. The *Final Report* contained an evaluation of the state of race relations in the United States based on months of research and experiential investigations and most importantly advised the nation in both speaking to the public and the federal government in ways to move forward. As a result of constraints inherent to temporary political Commissions and the sociopolitical climate at the time, the *Final Report* was a product of an immense task that featured expansive and abstract liberal ideas focused on individuals rather than the racially charged institutional

---

<sup>4</sup> Bill Barnhart and Gene Schlickman, *Kerner: The Conflict of Intangible Rights*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 217.

faults in American society. The adequacy of the Kerner Commission's findings remains a major debate in historical scholarship.

The initial perception and assessment of the riots were an important aspect of the way that the riots would be addressed in future policy decisions and racial opinions. The riots terrified the nation. The chaos and violence in so many cities won the attention of the nation and government officials. Many sociologists, economists, policymakers, and historians knew that it would be essential to the future of the nation to examine the political consequences of these events. While liberals, conservatives and radicals disagreed about the exact causes of rioting or the parties responsible, most agreed that the study of urban violence was vital based on its consequences for American society. Two main themes emerge from scholarship that studied the causation of the riots. The first was that the riots were an act of frustration as a result of the increasingly obvious relative deprivation experienced by the African American community in the post-Civil Rights Movement era, namely the failure of white society to deliver fully on many of the promises made to activists. The second was that these violent outbursts were an expression of political activity on behalf of the African American community and to some extent were important for bringing about social change.

In the immediate aftermath of the riots, Robert M. Fogelson produced his work *Violence as Protest: A Study of Riots and Ghettos*. Fogelson was a political scientist and author of several books on urban history and affairs. In the context of American society in the 1960s—a society that was increasingly focused on social change, Fogelson argues that the riots had greater meaning than senseless violence. As an early political scientist arguing that the riots were more about the dissatisfaction of the African American community with the pace of progress as the Civil Rights Movement came to a close, Fogelson is referencing the relative deprivation



experienced by these communities.<sup>5</sup> One of Fogelson's contemporaries, Edward Banfield, disagreed with many of his fellow scholars regarding the causes of the riots and represented the conservative perspective on the urban unrest of the 1960s. However, despite the differences inherent in Fogelson and Banfield's works, Banfield does make an important argument about the role that relative deprivation had as a primary cause of the riots. As a leading scholar in political science in the 1970s, Banfield produced historical scholarship on one of the major issues in American society with his work, *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Future of our Urban Crisis*.<sup>6</sup> Although his conservative language and outright rejection of the role that race and discrimination played in the riots earned him a label as an insensitive racist, Banfield explores the concept of relative deprivation in economic terms. Banfield perceived the riots as an issue inherent to low-income urban communities regardless of race. His central argument focused on the idea that impoverished inner-cities were places concentrated in low income, low skill, and low status people, admittedly most of them black, dangerously cut off from the rest of society both psychologically and physically.<sup>7</sup> As a result of this alienation and relative deprivation, these residents developed a group consciousness and identity that created an environment in which the riots occurred. Banfield's conservative views would garner much criticism from liberal and moderate scholars.

Paul Gilje's work, *Rioting in America*, while published later than both Fogelson and Banfield's incorporates relative deprivation as well. Gilje, reporting in the wake of the riots that occurred in the 1990s in Los Angeles and Detroit found that the 1960s riots were unlike anything that the United States has experienced at that point in its history. He argued that the riots arose in

---

<sup>5</sup> Robert M. Fogelson, "Violence as Protest," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* 29 (1), 1968, 25–41.

<sup>6</sup> Edward C. Banfield, *The Unheavenly City; the Nature and Future of Our Urban Crisis*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970).

<sup>7</sup> Edward C. Banfield, *The Unheavenly City*, 12.

a time of progress, almost as an effect of that progress. As democracy was extended to those who had never before received it, it became more apparent that the pace of progress was no longer satisfactory to these communities.<sup>8</sup> Gilje is referring to the relative deprivation faced by the African American communities during the socially progressive 1960s. In addition to his understanding of the importance that deprivation had as a cause of the violence, Gilje's work was essentially an exploration of the riots in the sense that there were numerous meanings behind such collective action.

Gilje emphasized the importance of riots as mechanisms for change; he argues that they express social discontent, illustrate discrepancies in the economic system, and have considerable affects on policymakers and policy in the United States.<sup>9</sup> He further asserted that the riots were instrumental in compelling political change and reflecting major social developments.<sup>10</sup> Fogelson's earlier work echoed this notion, arguing in his own work that the riots were political expressions aimed at obtaining the attention of white society.<sup>11</sup> In the same vein of thought was James Button's work *Black Violence: Political Impact of the 1960's Riots*. A work in which Button, a moderate political science and historical scholar of a series of articles on black politics, constructed an understanding of the riots that allowed them to take on political meaning.<sup>12</sup> Button completed an extensive study of the 1960s riots that examined the extent to which the riots secured a government response.<sup>13</sup> His findings concluded that the conservative argument, similar to the one found in Banfield's work that claimed violence was counterproductive, due to the white backlash, in effecting social change was wrong. He supported his findings with data

---

<sup>8</sup> Paul A. Gilje, *Rioting in America*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Gilje, *Rioting in America*, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Gilje, *Rioting in America*, 96.

<sup>11</sup> Fogelson, "Violence as Protest," 25–41.

<sup>12</sup> James W. Button, *Black Violence: Political Impact of the 1960s Riots*, Preface.

<sup>13</sup> Button, *Black Violence*, Preface.

that indicated that many federal officials interpreted black urban violence as political activity rather than senseless outbursts.<sup>14</sup> Button's work stands as a serious challenge to the conservative view that riots in the 1960s were solely lawless and counterproductive behavior by a minority group.

Characterization of the riots as political expressions of the African American community was not an idea unique to Banfield and Gilje. Peter Rossi also argues that the riots of the 1960s had political value that far surpassed senseless violence. As a sociologist on the rise to prominence in the early 1970s, Rossi's work *Ghetto Revolts* analyzed the riots as large-scale collective actions, which displayed widespread defiance for the established authority. Rossi depicted the events of the late 1960s as, "expressions of deep feelings of deprivation, exposing the growing alienation of blacks from the larger society, its values and its official representatives."<sup>15</sup> Similar to Banfield, Rossi identifies an element of alienation in the communities rioting, but the alienation he referred to was due to a racial divide. Rossi went on to criticize the Kerner Commission's assessment of the riots, as would many other major historical scholars.

Historical scholarship regarding the Kerner Commission's investigation of the urban riots and their *Final Report* recommendations include three main themes. The first requires analysis of the Commission's investigative methods. The second critiques the inconsistencies of the introduction's focus on white racism and the third centers on the attempts of the Commission to tailor their recommendations to the Presidential agenda. Mical Raz examines the relationship between the violence in the late 1960s and psychological detachment theories in his work

---

<sup>14</sup> James W. Button, *Black Violence*.

<sup>15</sup> Peter H. Rossi, *Ghetto Revolts*, (Chicago: Aldine Pub. Company, 1970), 2.

“What’s Wrong with the Poor?”<sup>16</sup> Raz argues that advances in the understanding of deprivation theory allowed social scientists and psychologists at the time of the Kerner Commission’s investigation to provide the members with a highly politicized and scientifically supported understanding of urban violence.<sup>17</sup> The addition of hired research teams with a thorough grasp on social deprivation theory proved to be a valuable component in the Commission’s research initiatives. Raz specifically cites the example of Robert Shellow’s research team, which produced the highly controversial “Harvest of American Racism” report. Shellow’s research team relied heavily on social and political theory in their evaluation of the riots, namely the theory of relative deprivation that the Commission would hear from many witnesses in testimony and fieldwork.<sup>18</sup> Various forms of deprivation encountered by the Commission members and researchers were represented in the *Final Report*. Raz concluded that the findings in the *Final Report* were supported by scientific theory and data but the *Report* was a largely flawed product.<sup>19</sup>

Raz asserted that the *Report* went further than minor flaws but was “riddled with inconsistencies.”<sup>20</sup> This was largely due to the fact that the *Report* became so closely identified with its Introduction. This proved problematic as the introduction was not an accurate depiction of the majority of the *Report*’s findings and conclusions, which rarely focused solely on white racism.<sup>21</sup> Raz concluded that in the end the *Report* would be “too radical for conservatives and

---

<sup>16</sup> Mical Raz, *What’s Wrong With The Poor?*, (The University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> Mical Raz, *What’s Wrong With The Poor?*, 142.

<sup>18</sup> Mical Raz, *What’s Wrong With The Poor?*, 154.

<sup>19</sup> Mical Raz, *What’s Wrong With The Poor?*, 165.

<sup>20</sup> Mical Raz, *What’s Wrong With The Poor?*, 165.

<sup>21</sup> Mical Raz, *What’s Wrong With The Poor?*, 165.

too conservative for those who wished to see radical restructuring of American race relations” which left many unsatisfied with its conclusions and recommendations.<sup>22</sup>

In contrast to Raz’s issues with the introduction, Rossi argued that the conclusions and recommendation in the *Report* were inadequate in relation to the commission’s emphasis of white racism as a cause in the Introduction. According to Rossi, the *Report* failed to deliver policy recommendations on how to solve the attitudinal issues in American society that they asserted were the main cause for race issues in the late 1960s.<sup>23</sup> Malcolm McLaughlin’s work *The Long Hot Summer of 1967* viewed the *Final Report* in a more celebratory tone than some more critical scholars. McLaughlin asserted that it was the introduction that allowed the *Report* to capture the mood of the nation and read similar to an expose.<sup>24</sup> He also attributed much of the *Report*’s success to the strong phrasing found in the infamous Introduction. He argued that the rhetoric fostered a popular consciousness among the public in regards to race relations, a major success of the commission’s work.<sup>25</sup> In contrast to McLaughlin’s praise of the Introduction’s impact on the *Report*, Marx felt that it fostered a negative response amongst scholars and critics. Marx attributed the *Report*’s relatively bad reputation amongst historical scholars to a misunderstanding of the meaning behind the focus on white racism as a primary cause of the riots. Characterizing the Introduction as “politically inopportune and sociologically oversimplified,” he argued that it was a strategic decision made by the Commission for a number of reasons.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Mical Raz, *What’s Wrong With The Poor?*, 167.

<sup>23</sup> Peter H. Rossi, *Ghetto Revolts*, (Chicago: Aldine Pub. Company, 1970), 11.

<sup>24</sup> Malcolm McLaughlin, *The Long Hot Summer of 1967: Urban Rebellion in America*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 22.

<sup>25</sup> Malcolm McLaughlin, *The Long Hot Summer of 1967*, 24.

<sup>26</sup> Gary Marx, “Two Cheers for the National Riot (Kerner) Commission Report,” in J.F. Szwed, *Black Americans: A Second Look*, (Basic Books, 1970). Stable URL: <http://web.mit.edu/gtmarx/www/kerner.html>.

A main reason that Marx argues the Commission made the decision to support the strongly worded introduction was because they used the concept of white racism to support their assertion that the issues faced by the African American community were results of the social organization in the United States. He concedes to critics that the Commission's explanation of the role of white racism in the unrest could have been expressed in a more sophisticated way.<sup>27</sup> Marx's work offers both praise for the commission for undertaking such an enormous societal issue and criticism for its abstract concepts and general recommendations, concluding, "because it [the *Report*] accuses everyone, it accuses no one."<sup>28</sup>

McLaughlin argued that the *Report* focused on white racism as an underlying cause for the riots but that it most frequently cited persistent poverty as the main cause of the urban riots.<sup>29</sup> He argued that this was a deliberate move on the commission's part to use its platform to affirm the value of Johnson's War on Poverty; a decision demonstrative of their understanding that the *Report* would fair far better if it left the Johnson administration and major institutions relatively unscathed.<sup>30</sup> McLaughlin found the commission to produce "politically awkward recommendations" that implied society would benefit from the expansion of Great Society programs.<sup>31</sup> The main fault in their conclusions stemmed from the perpetuation of the idea that the racial crisis could be solved through minor improvements made to existing American institutions.<sup>32</sup> In reference to the police chapter of the *Report*, McLaughlin argued that recommendations were founded in "broadly progressive ideas" that neglected institutional level

---

<sup>27</sup> Gary Marx, "Two Cheers for the National Riot (Kerner) Commission Report."

<sup>28</sup> Gary Marx, "Two Cheers for the National Riot (Kerner) Commission Report."

<sup>29</sup> Malcolm McLaughlin, *The Long Hot Summer of 1967*, 23.

<sup>30</sup> Malcolm McLaughlin, *The Long Hot Summer of 1967*, 23.

<sup>31</sup> Malcolm McLaughlin, *The Long Hot Summer of 1967*, 40.

<sup>32</sup> Malcolm McLaughlin, *The Long Hot Summer of 1967*, 37.

reform and utilized a too simplistic view of race in the United States.<sup>33</sup> This criticism was characteristic throughout the entire *Report*.

The *Report's* use of strong language in conjunction with its avoidance in attacking major institutions in American society, resulted in its ultimate failure to identify the direct role of federal, state, and local policies in perpetuating the racial divisions in society that were a factor in the riots.<sup>34</sup> Andrew Highsmith, argued that the decision to include the moralistic rhetoric found in the introduction the commission showed on some level its intention to be a force for change but its failure to produce specific recommendations detracted from its significance as a political document.<sup>35</sup>

Despite major criticisms from historical scholars on both ends of the political spectrum, many praised the *Report* for its educational value. Michael Lipsky and David J. Olson's work *Commission Politics: The Processing of Racial Crisis in America* examines the formation of commissions as a response to the urban violence in the 1960s and the relative influence in American society. Chapters four, five, and six were dedicated solely to an analysis of the Kerner Commission. The authors were critical of the Kerner Commission's timid nature when addressing issues that could have shed light on federal government failures. They found that in the long-term the *Report* has not fared well for a variety of reasons. One important factor is the nature of Commissions—they are temporary, operate under strict time restraints, and often work with sensitive subjects. They conclude that the Commission's *Report* failed as a political document due to its general and ambiguous policy recommendations, but as an educational

---

<sup>33</sup> Malcolm McLaughlin, *The Long Hot Summer of 1967*, 55.

<sup>34</sup> Andrew R. Highsmith, "Demolition Means Progress: Race, Class and Destruction of American Dream in Flint, Michigan," (Dissertation of Philosophy and History, University of Michigan, 2009), 403.

<sup>35</sup> Andrew R. Highsmith, "Demolition Means Progress," 403.

document the *Report* fared quite well.<sup>36</sup> The Kerner Commission existed to force the American public to talk about solutions to race issues.

How did policymakers perceive the riots of the late 1960s? How did the Kerner Commission's Report and Recommendations change their assessment of the riots and how did this combination shape civil rights policies to come after this time period, which still affect the United States today? The Kerner Commission's report has remained a touchstone for race relation debate in the United States that persist today. However, after examination of the processes by which the Kerner Commission came to the conclusions expressed in the *Final Report* it can be argued that despite a seemingly strong desire to produce a liberal and hard-hitting report, the commission advocated for general reforms rather than specific progressive structural changes. Their avoidance of major institutional reform was a result of attempts by the federal government to limit the scope of their findings at a time of political instability and the over-bearing introductory portion of the *Report* that would overshadow the depth of the *Report* in its entirety. The dependence of the *Report* on white racism as an underlying cause of the riots would serve as a way to call for moderate changes rather than revolutionary reforms, a defining characteristic of the commission and its *Final Report*.

---

<sup>36</sup> Michael Lipsky and David J. Olsen, *Commission Politics: The Processing of Racial Crisis in America*, (Transaction Books: New Brunswick, NJ, 1977).



The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders was created on July 28, 1967, when President Lyndon Baines Johnson issued Executive Order 11365,<sup>1</sup> amidst the severe violence of the Detroit riot and the series of riots that came before. Urban riots, in this form, were a very unique and fairly new occurrence in the United States in the late 1960s. Therefore President Johnson formed the Kerner Commission to investigate and find a solution for this very pressing problem. Commission member Fred Harris was credited with urging Johnson and Congress to formally name a group to study the riots, not an uncommon practice throughout the 1960s, as he believed it was an urgent issue in American society and government.<sup>2</sup>

From the very beginning the Commission was aware of the nearly impossible task the President had given them—"you have been given a mandate to look into the soul of America to find out what is causing this disorder."<sup>3</sup> The President had asked the Commission to find the answer to three questions in response to the riots: "What happened? Why did it happen? and What can be done to prevent it from happening again?"<sup>4</sup> President Johnson asked the members to attend all the meetings and to give this work their highest priority during the life of the panel.<sup>5</sup> Their work would be complex and controversial but in the turbulent context of the 1960s, commissions were called upon to address pressing questions and the urban riots were no different.

The Commission was comprised of ten men (two of African- American descent) and one woman. Representing various institutions in American society including the political sphere, labor, law enforcement and business. The commission became known as the Kerner Commission

---

<sup>1</sup> Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration 1963-1969 Part V: Records of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (Kerner Commission), Steven F. Lawson, ed., Microfilm Reel 1, (Frederick, University Publications of America, Inc., 1967), 1, Hereafter referred to as: Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>2</sup> "Senator Harris: Key Figure in the Study of Riots," *The Washington Star*, March 10, 1968.

<sup>3</sup> Transcripts, August 2, 1967, Microfilm Reel 1, page 269, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>4</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1968), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Transcripts, August 2, 1967, Microfilm Reel 1, page 3, Kerner Commission Records.

after its Chairman, Democratic Governor of Illinois, Otto Kerner. Kerner's appointment as Chairman was a deliberate decision made by President Johnson based on his political connections. Kerner, whom was raised in Chicago to a politically powerful family and had an excellent reputation among the media, was a very strategic and sensible choice.<sup>6</sup> With Kerner as Chairman, the Commission received widespread press coverage in its beginning days that would be mirrored with the release of the report.<sup>7</sup> Kerner also had the political experience to support his appointment, having worked as the United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois and served on the National Governors Conference Executive Committee chairing the Commission.<sup>8</sup>

The appointment of the liberal Republican mayor of New York City, John Lindsay to Vice-Chairman was another important decision made by President Johnson. Lindsay was chosen partly because of his experience in civil rights and also because a non-partisan commission was important and a Republican Vice-Chairman would add balance. As a Republican, Lindsay was an anomaly within the party and stood closer to liberal Democrats on the issue of civil rights legislation, advocating more adamantly than many of the liberals on the commission for increases in massive federal spending on behalf of the urban poor.<sup>9</sup> His liberal views made sense when examining where Lindsay started in the political arena. He worked as an executive assistant to Attorney General Brownell in the Justice Department where he worked on the Civil Rights Act of 1957.<sup>10</sup> He then spent six years in Congress followed by his election to Mayor and

---

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Hrach, "The News Media and the Disorders: The Kerner Commission's Examination of Race Riots and Civil Disturbances 1967-68," (Scripps College of Communication of Ohio University, June 2008), 59.

<sup>7</sup> William S. White, "Reassuring Note . . . First Actions By Panel Hailed," *Washington Post*, August 14, 1967.

<sup>8</sup> Gene Schlickman, *Kerner: The Conflict of Intangible Rights by Bill Barnhart*, Indiana Magazine of History, Vol. 96: 4, (Indiana University Department of History: 2000), <http://0www.jstor.org/mercury.concordia.ca/stable/27792286>.

<sup>9</sup> Bill Barnhart and Gene Schlickman, *Kerner: The Conflict of Intangible Rights*, 198.

<sup>10</sup> "Lindsay Victory Puts Him in FORE; He is Seen as G.O.P. Hope in Election to Congress from 17<sup>th</sup> District, *New York Times*, 1958, 31.

his time spent with the Commission. At the time of his appointment he was a “rising star” in the Republican Party and was being praised in the press.<sup>11</sup> Lindsay became one of the most active and vocal members of the Kerner Commission. He is also credited with the strong moralistic rhetoric, found throughout the *Final Report’s* introduction, one of the most quoted documents in race relations. Specifically, the most famous quote of the *Report*, “our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal.”<sup>12</sup>

Two members whom would be specifically influential in the Media Chapter of the *Report* and added diversity to the Commission were Roy Wilkins and Katherine Graham Peden. Wilkins was the Executive Director of the NAACP at the time of his appointment but had previously had professional experience with the media as the editor and reporter for two black newspapers.<sup>13</sup> Peden, the only female member, was the Kentucky Commissioner of Commerce at the time of her appointment but had also remained the owner of a Kentucky radio station.<sup>14</sup>

Edward Brooke, a Republican Senator from Massachusetts, was one of the two African American members on the Commission. Thus, Brooke was an essential member as a black citizen and as a Republican. He was the first African American popularly elected to the Senate in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and he then became the Attorney General of Massachusetts from 1963-1967.<sup>15</sup> He also had a background in years of dealing with the press; he was among the best known members of the Commission.<sup>16</sup> Fred R. Harris, a Democratic Senator from Oklahoma, was the youngest member at the age of thirty-six and became known as a very vocal member of the commission.

---

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Hrach, “The News Media and the Disorders, 77.

<sup>12</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Times Staff and Wire Reports. “Katherine Peden, 80; Broadcaster Served on Panel Studying Riots.” *Los Angeles Times*. January 12, 2006. <http://articles.latimes.com/2006/jan/12/local/me-passings12.1>

<sup>14</sup> Microfilm Guide to the Records of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, August 2, 1967, 1.

<sup>15</sup> John Cutler, *Biography of a Senator: Ed Brooke*, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972), 104-105.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Hrach, “The News Media and the Disorders, 87.

The Commission also included two Congressmen, James Corman and William McCulloch. Corman served as a city council member of Los Angeles and represented the City of Watts, a place notorious for its large riot. He was a liberal Democrat and outspoken supporter of the president, thus a logical choice.<sup>17</sup> McCulloch was Republican from Ohio with more than twenty years experience in Congress. In addition to political figures the Commission had members that represented other American institutions, such as labor. The head of the United Steelworkers of America, I.W. Abel served as a labor representative on the Commission. Abel was widely known as a proponent of the Civil Rights Movement and an ally of the union movement.<sup>18</sup> Another representative of business, Charles “Tex” Thornton, the founder of Litton Industries, quickly emerged as a vocal Commission member known for asking witnesses forward and pressing questions during hearings. Thornton was a Texas native and the most conservative Commission member.<sup>19</sup> Lastly, Herbert Jenkins, the Police Chief of Atlanta Georgia, represented the institution of law enforcement on the Commission. Jenkins was considered a progressive police chief and had won praise for his management of the racial violence in Atlanta.

If the Commission’s recommendations were going to have any authority in the political sphere or public eye it was important that it be bi-partisan and comprised of diverse members. The Commission was given an enormous task with great time constraints, as it was a time sensitive matter. The Executive Order gave the commission a year to complete its task, primarily to ensure that the *Report* was published and widely circulated before the next summers rioting season.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the members had to be diverse enough to be representative but also had to work together in order to present a unified report. The diversity of interests within the

---

<sup>17</sup> Bill Barnhart and Gene Schlickman, *Kerner: The Conflict of Intangible Rights*, 199.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Pearson, “Longtime Steelworkers Chief I.W. Abel Dies at Age of 78,” *Washington Post*, August 11, 1987.

<sup>19</sup> Bill Barnhart and Gene Schlickman, *Kerner: The Conflict of Intangible Rights*, 198.

<sup>20</sup> Bill Barnhart and Gene Schlickman, *Kerner: The Conflict of Intangible Rights*, 200.

commission made the publication of the *Final Report* ahead of schedule, an outstanding accomplishment in cooperation and research. The Commission was assigned to make their investigation comprehensive but each member usually took on their field of expertise within the research and discussions.<sup>21</sup> In terms of biases the Commissioners were above all, people, whose life experiences affected the way they perceived events, including the riots, race relations and ultimately, the *Final Report*.

The Kerner Commission met for the first time on July 29, 1967, one day after President Johnson had issued the executive order that created the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. The Commission would meet over the course of forty-four days, complete field work in twenty-three cities, conduct 1,200 interviews, attitude surveys and other serious studies of conditions, in addition to hearing the testimony of one hundred and thirty witnesses. The Commission had no formal limitations or restrictions in procedure from the White House but many scholars argued that the Johnson attempted to steer the Commission in a direction that would reflect the successes of his administration. At a time when the Vietnam War was increasingly unpopular among Americans, Johnson had come under pressure to mend his reputation and appear as a competent president.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, steering the Commission in a more conservative direction that praised Johnson's programs was a top priority for his administration. This expectation for the Commission was established by a memo from his assistant Joseph Califano to the Kerner Commission that indicated the limited scope in which the commission was expected to operate within. The memo stated that the commission was "not to call for any spending of money... clearly not to touch the war and national priorities, clearly not to criticize the administration and what the government had done but to praise the Great Society and say we

---

<sup>21</sup> Michael Lipsky and David J. Olsen, *Commission Politics*, 214.

<sup>22</sup> Bill Barnhart and Gene Schlickman, *Kerner: The Conflict of Intangible Rights*, 200.

should continue with it.”<sup>23</sup> This memo is demonstrative of the extent to which Johnson was worried about the political impact of the *Report* and speaks to what Bill Barnhart and Gene Schlickman referred to as the Great Society transactional model.<sup>24</sup> This model suggested that Johnson formed the commission with the hope that their comprehensive assessment would only produce recommendations that reflected positively on his administration. A hope that was only partially fulfilled, as evidenced by his cold reception of their *Final Report* due to their citations of persistent poverty even in areas with Great Society programs in action and their call for more national action.

The Commission realized that the issue they were investigating was time sensitive. At the same time they were keenly aware of how influential their report could be if they worked diligently to produce a well thought out end result. In the first meetings Chairman Kerner gives top priority to thorough but efficient investigation methods. In an attempt to halt the pattern of urban violence in the United States, a timeline for publication was set to release the *Final Report* before the next riot season.<sup>25</sup> Their subject material would be sensitive and complex for a variety of reasons. While their basic responsibility was to produce their best evaluation of the situation in the form of a report, they also had an obligation to remain as objective as possible in their assessment. All members were respectful and mindful of those testifying, asking productive questions and thanking each person whom testified regardless of the content of the testimony.<sup>26</sup>

In their first meeting the Commission began to make decisions regarding important aspects of their work such as methodology, use of media, and range of people invited to testify.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Vincent J. Cannato, *The Ungovernable City: John Lindsay and His Struggle to Save New York*, (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 205.

<sup>24</sup> Bill Barnhart and Gene Schlickman, *Kerner: The Conflict of Intangible Rights*, 205.

<sup>25</sup> Transcripts, August 1, 1967, Reel 2, page 1, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>26</sup> Transcripts of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, Reels 1-5.

<sup>27</sup> Transcripts, August 1, 1967, Reel 1, page 4, Kerner Commission Records.

They discussed the various groups of people they could interview for testimony—sociologists, investigators, economists, academics, civil rights activists, police commissioners, national guardsmen, mayors, governors, any government employee—were all considered.<sup>28</sup> While the Commission minimal formal limitations from the President he did stress the importance of the black opinion, in order to avoid a public relations issue in which the Commission was seen as a “white man’s haven.”<sup>29</sup> This lack of formal guidance on the part of Johnson did not inhibit the Commission from censoring their recommendations, by largely ignoring the issues inherent in American institutions, as a result of the informal pressure they received from the Johnson administration. This is largely demonstrated their policy recommendations that amended rather than revolutionized policy at the time. They found that confrontations with major institutions of American society would be detrimental to the report’s acceptability.<sup>30</sup> The Commission set about their great task with the goal of a comprehensive and fair examination in mind.

In beginning to make such major decisions regarding who would testify, how the Commission would operate, how each member would begin to visit the cities, and how often the Commission would meet, it became clear there were many logistical issues to be worked out before the Commission could begin their investigation.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, the Commission consulted the experience of those that had come before them in the most comparable type of investigation, members of the Warren Commission. The Kerner Commission’s *Final Report* fared much better in the long-term than the Warren Commission and much of this can be contributed to the sociopolitical climate, in which Americans feared future racial violence and were seemingly ready for societal change, at the time of the *Report’s* publication. It was also a result of the

---

<sup>28</sup> Transcripts, August 1, 1967, Reel 1, page 4, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>29</sup> Transcripts, August 1, 1967, Reel 1, page 12, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Hrach, “The News Media and the Disorders, 130.

<sup>31</sup> Transcripts, August 1, 1967, Reel 1, page 1, Kerner Commission Records.

special detail that the Commission paid to keeping the public and press involved in their investigation.<sup>32</sup> This assured the public that the Commission was doing diligent work and conditioned people for the recommendations of the *Report*.

Arthur Rankin, New York City Corporation Counsel, advised the Commission with information from his experience with the Warren Commission.<sup>33</sup> Rankin quickly explained that the Warren Commission faced constant criticism and attack from all. They found that having a majority outside the government would be helpful in the investigation. Unfortunately, it proved to be difficult to find those with skills comparable to the FBI, CIA and other government intelligence agencies outside of the government.<sup>34</sup> Thus, this seemingly influenced the Commission's decision to include more testimony from government employees in their hearings for practical purposes. Rankin gave the Commission a better idea of the citizen's expectations when it came to their report—"I don't think the citizens are concerned about what causes riots, what the cure is for riots, they want to know the facts."<sup>35</sup> He was also quick to warn that no matter what type of methodology they used, no matter how thorough or accurate their report was, there would be "certain groups that will be after you from the first day you start and they will attack your action because you don't get the kinds of results they want."<sup>36</sup> Rankin's advice was reflective of the criticisms that commissions had faced in the past and prepared the Kerner Commission for the uphill battle that addressing race relations in the United States would be.

In their first meeting, all commission members decided that it was important to avoid a courtroom atmosphere in order to create a more fluid educational space for their hearings. The unique nature of the Commission's situation, not dealing with a single riot but with a series of

---

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Hrach, "The News Media and the Disorders, 102.

<sup>33</sup> Microfilm Guide to the Records of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, August 2, 1967, 2.

<sup>34</sup> Transcripts, August 1, 1967, Reel 1, page 22, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>35</sup> Transcripts, August 1, 1967, Reel 1, page 24, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>36</sup> Transcripts, August 1, 1967, Reel 1, page 22, Kerner Commission Records.



ongoing riots—the Detroit riots coming to a close as the Commission was formed and minor riots occurring throughout the summer in which the first meetings took place—allowed a certain amount of freedom when it came to methodology. In their first meeting the Commission made important decisions about how they would conduct their study.<sup>37</sup> They decided that hearings would be closed to the press so they could develop a published final report to deliver to the public all at once. It was also decided that in addition to hearing testimony all commission members would get the chance to visit urban areas in which riots had occurred to experience the environment as well as speak with community members.<sup>38</sup>

The tours and testimony were an important and influential source of insight for the commissioners. Listening and speaking to real people who had expertise in a field associated to the issue or people who had experienced urban riots themselves allowed the Commission members to gain a greater and more humanized perspective in their study. This direct exposure to ghetto conditions, it was hoped, would generate a better sense of the scale of the issues and would foster unity within the commission because these guided tours were taken in pairs.<sup>39</sup> Commissioners would familiarize themselves with the conditions that surrounded the urban riots and with the other members, which would then create a shared basis of understanding.<sup>40</sup> This common ground would then translate into a shared understanding when it came to recommending policy for the *Final Report*. It is evidenced in the discussion portion of the many testimonies that this goal was realized in some part because of the frequency with which Commissioners reflect back on their tour experience. Thus, the tours and hearing aspect of the investigation exposed the Commissioners a side of the investigation they did not experience in

---

<sup>37</sup> Transcripts, August 1, 1967, Reel 1, page 41, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>38</sup> Transcripts, August 1, 1967, Reel 1, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Lipsky and David J. Olsen, *Commission Politics*, 218.

<sup>40</sup> Michael Lipsky and David J. Olsen, *Commission Politics*, 219.

the hearings. Firsthand experience in African American communities coupled with hearing the residents' personal struggles, provided the commission with further insight into the sensitive and human issue they studied and was necessary in order to produce an adequate analysis of such an issue.

The one hundred and thirty witnesses who provided testimony were from various backgrounds and testified on a variety of subjects. People on all ends of the political and professional spectrum mentioned white racism as an underlying cause of other social ills. Several testimonies that cited housing, unemployment, and educational issues in the African American community came from all of the different groups of those who testified and included some sort of reference to racial discrimination as a cause or major factor in these social issues. Through review and analysis of commission meeting transcripts one can further understand how the commission came to their conclusions. Two main concepts that became prominent early on were the effects that racial discrimination against African Americans had on the rioting communities and the relative deprivation that those same communities felt after promises of the Civil Rights Movement had not come to fruition quickly enough. These concepts would be an important part of the commission's investigation and appeared in the *Final Report*. Firsthand experience with the African American community was essential in understanding the riots.

In order to answer the President's first question—why the riots happened, the commission had to understand the communities that rioted. A majority of segregated African American communities were disproportionately youthful, a fact that was true of nearly all the cities that endured riots. In addition this younger generation of African Americans was inherently different than the generations that had come before them. They were less willing to accept the growing gap in the treatment that people received based on race, as evidenced by the testimony

of Ernest Garret and Hugh Addonizio. Ernest Garret, a member of the Board of Education in Newark, testified in regard to the sentiment that the younger generation in the African American community was “tired” and felt they did not want to “get pushed around anymore.”<sup>41</sup> These expressions signified the impact that the philosophy of the Civil Rights Movement had on these younger black citizens. Mayor Hugh Addonizio, of Newark New Jersey, touched on the fact that the African American population was disproportionately young in Newark and many other central cities with riot problems. These young people were raised in an environment in which the generations that came before them had repeatedly attempted to be treated equally and had been oppressed by white society each time.<sup>42</sup>

Mayor Cavanaugh of Detroit, a city infamous for its riots in the summer of 1967, spoke with the Commission regarding his assessment of the race relations in his city. Cavanaugh described the riots as a “powder keg” that had been ignited as a result of the continued discrimination and segregation that remained a part of the lives of African American citizens even after the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>43</sup> Cavanaugh’s testimony focused on the denial of equal opportunity for advancement and progress in the African American community as a result of the previous “generations of neglect.”<sup>44</sup> As the white mayor of a city that endured immense damage from these riots, his assessment placing blame on white citizens was a significant addition to commissions understanding of what he believed to be the main cause—attitudes of whites. His argument was that this situation “requires something else that many of us have spoken about for a number of years, and that is a reordering of our national priorities, and this is not said in the

---

<sup>41</sup> Transcripts, August 22, 1967, Reel 2, page 720, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>42</sup> Transcripts, August 22, 1967, Reel 2, page 667, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>43</sup> Transcripts, August 15, 1967, Reel 2, page 415, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>44</sup> Transcripts, August 15, 1967, Reel 2, page 433, Kerner Commission Records.

form of a cliché.”<sup>45</sup> He argued that redress for racial injustice of the past should take the form of race relations being the nation’s top priority, a conclusion that is line with the findings in the *Final Report*. Piri Thomas, a resident of the Spanish Harlem section of New York City and author of the best-selling autobiography, *Down These Mean Streets*,<sup>46</sup> requested that the commission not expect the youngest generation of African Americans to accept what their fathers and forefathers accepted.<sup>47</sup> This new generation of African Americans had been witness to much strife in their communities led by the generations that came before them and were no longer accepting the promises of progress that white society had failed to deliver on.

African American communities joined these frustrated black youths in the riots as an expression of their desire for equality within American society, or as Piri Thomas said the “God damn chance that belongs to all of us... our right as human beings.”<sup>48</sup> His experiences furthered the cause that it was the ills of a life in the ghetto perpetuated through discrimination that ailed the African American community.”<sup>49</sup> Governor Romney of Michigan’s testimony would elaborate further on the psychological aspect of oppression in black communities. Romney cited the complaints of his black constituents regarding housing, education, employment opportunities, and police brutality. However, he felt that what they wanted most was “human dignity” from their white counterparts.<sup>50</sup> Hearing this same concept from another authority figure further convinced the Commission that the issue was rooted in the psychological effects of discrimination on African Americans stemming from American attitudes. The arguments put forth by those in authoritative positions in metropolitan areas would be supported and further

---

<sup>45</sup> Transcripts, August 15, 1967, Reel 2, page 434, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>46</sup> “Piri Thomas’ Life and Flows...” <http://www.cheverote.com/bio.html>.

<sup>47</sup> Transcripts, September 21, 1967, Reel 3, page 1568, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>48</sup> Transcripts, September 21, 1967, Reel 3, page 1562, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>49</sup> Transcripts, September 21, 1967, Reel 3, page 1562, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>50</sup> Transcripts, September 12, 1967, Reel 2, page 887, Kerner Commission Records.

developed in the testimonies of those with personal and academic experience in race relations.

Thomas made an important distinction in his testimony when he acknowledged the African American community desired for equality rather than charity. Thomas also described the goals of the riots, "...we're not asking to take over this country. We're just asking to share it. You give us the name Americans. You preach throughout the whole world democracy. You say this is the land of freedom."<sup>51</sup> African Americans sought to exist within the system rather than destroy it.

An emotional look into the hardships faced by the African American community was embodied in testimony delivered by civil rights activist Ernie Chambers of Omaha.<sup>52</sup> Chamber's hostile testimony focused on the trials and tribulations faced by African Americans throughout the nation. At the conclusion of his testimony, Commissioner Brooke offered a comment to show his solidarity with Mr. Chamber's basic concerns,

Mr. Chambers I understand your bitterness and angriness. But I know that you also reflect the thinking of a good many black people in this country who are angry and bitter... this has been built up in time over years and years... We won't benefit unless we get down to the practical things as to what can be done in this country now. I know you are bitter about the past, I am bitter about the past, a lot of people are, I want to see equality in this country, as you do.<sup>53</sup>

Brooke's response offered insight into the perspective of both a commissioner and an African American citizen.

A concept consistently found in the Kerner Commission's investigation centered on the rising expectations that resulted from the Civil Rights Movement and the relative deprivation experienced by the African American community. The social theory of deprivation was an inherently important concept for the Kerner Commission's research and understanding of race

---

<sup>51</sup> Transcripts, September 21, 1967, Reel 3, page 1563, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>52</sup> Microfilm Guide to the Records of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, August 2, 1967, 5.

<sup>53</sup> Transcripts, September 21, 1967, Reel 3, page 1590, Kerner Commission Records.

relations and riots.<sup>54</sup> Although in order to understand the present, it was necessary for commissioners to understand the past. Dr. Benjamin Quarles, Chairman of the Department of History at Morgan State College in Baltimore, presented the Commission with a comprehensive look at African American history and the institutionalization of white racism.<sup>55</sup> The foundation of poor race relations in the United States began with the invention of the institution of slavery. Quarles argued that within the institution of slavery blacks were deprived socially and economically and therefore fell into a socio-economic pattern in which the racial superiority of whites and racial inferiority of blacks was accepted as true.<sup>56</sup> However, in 1954 the African American community expectations rose as a result of legal action on behalf of the Supreme Court. Unfortunately, the failure on the behalf of the federal government to bring about meaningful change had allowed frustration to grow in the black community and the resulting effect was the riots.<sup>57</sup> Following the conclusion of Quarles' testimony, to gain a deeper sense of Quarles' opinion, Senator Harris inquired about the extent to which white racism caused the recent racial unrest. Quarles countered with a proposal to begin studying "what is wrong with white people" rather than studying the African American community because he felt it absolutely essential for society to address the roots of prejudice.<sup>58</sup>

Kenneth Clark, one of the more famous witnesses for the Commission, reiterated the same notion regarding the psychological toll that oppression and discrimination had on the younger generation. The Commission explicitly stated their excitement for his testimony.<sup>59</sup> Their gratefulness for his testimony was not unfounded, Clark was the first African-American

---

<sup>54</sup> Mical Raz, *What's Wrong With The Poor?*, 165.

<sup>55</sup> Transcripts, September 12, 1967, Reel 2, page 999, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>56</sup> Transcripts, September 12, 1967, Reel 2, page 1005, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>57</sup> Transcripts, September 12, 1967, Reel 2, page 1015, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>58</sup> Transcripts, September 12, 1967, Reel 2, page 1033, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>59</sup> Transcripts, September 13, 1967, Reel 3, page 1223, Kerner Commission Records.

professor to be tenured at the City College of New York and he was also the first, and only, African American to be president of the American Psychological Association.<sup>60</sup> This acclaim was a result of Clark's contribution in the *Brown versus Board of Education* decision. In this case Clark presented his findings on the effects that segregation had on children in an effort for desegregation of schools.<sup>61</sup> He focused his testimony on the "mood of the Negro in the United States today."<sup>62</sup> Taking on the role of social diagnostician, he described the race relations situation in the United States as a "severe and viral disease."<sup>63</sup> After depicting the dismal realities of the urban ghettos he appealed to the Commission to examine the greater society, especially privileged segments, to understand why the riots occurred.<sup>64</sup> As a consequence of those in power doing nothing visible to alleviate the issues in the ghetto, immense frustration was being expressed through violence. Clark he described the important symbolization of the ghetto as, "the most concrete manifestations of the persistent, pervasive immorality of the American system, and it is difficult for privileged Americans, white or black, to face in its full significance and implication."<sup>65</sup>

A recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize with graduate training in theology, Martin Luther King, Jr. employed his experiences as a civil rights activists and his mastery of social theory in his testimony for the commission.<sup>66</sup> Dr. King's testimony began with his accusation that white policymakers and white society are at fault for the current state of race relations stating, "they created discrimination, they created slums, they perpetuate unemployment, ignorance and

---

<sup>60</sup> Richard Severo, "Kenneth Clark, Who Fought Segregation, Dies", *The New York Times*, 2 May 2005.

<sup>61</sup> Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities. "Kenneth Bancroft Clark". *Robert Penn Warren's Who Speaks for the Negro? Archive*, Stable URL: <http://whospeaks.library.vanderbilt.edu/interview/kenneth-bancroft-clark>.

<sup>62</sup> Transcripts, September 13, 1967, Reel 3, page 1223, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>63</sup> Transcripts, September 13, 1967, Reel 3, page 1226, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>64</sup> Transcripts, September 13, 1967, Reel 3, page 1230, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>65</sup> Transcripts, September 13, 1967, Reel 3, page 1241, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>66</sup> Mical Raz, *What's Wrong With The Poor?*, 157-158.

poverty.”<sup>67</sup> He did not advocate for the lawless activities of the rioters but he did define them as derivative crimes of living within the oppressive white society. King found there to be five immediate causes of the riots—white backlash, unemployment, general discriminatory practices, the Vietnam War, and features specific to inner cities such as poor housing and unsanitary conditions.<sup>68</sup>

King explained the riots as responses that mirrored white violence that was unleashed on the Civil Rights Movement. In response to a common argument among policymakers that the immense progress made by the civil rights movement made the riots a peculiar phenomena, King did not refute that the movement did enjoy several successes. He did however, argue that the reactions of whites, particularly in the South, to the gains made by the civil rights movement were cruel and often went without consequence. The reactionary violence of southern whites to the movement was often something that was highlighted in the media and the African American communities in central cities were well aware of the treatment young activists received.<sup>69</sup> He found in his experience that discrimination “pervades all experiences of negro life” which created the deep-seated frustration within young African Americans who are largely participants of the riots.<sup>70</sup>

King’s technique employed in his testimony was similar to the process by which the Kerner Commission produced its *Report*—a mixture of familiarity coupled with academic experience. King warned of the “syndrome of deprivation” rampant in the African American community and as a result of this deep-rooted deprivation suggested a Bill of Rights for the disadvantaged with the intent that it would transform the conditions of African American life

---

<sup>67</sup> Transcripts, October 23, 1967, Reel 4, page 2775, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>68</sup> Transcripts, October 23, 1967, Reel 4, page 2775, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>69</sup> Transcripts, October 23, 1967, Reel 4, page 2776, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>70</sup> Transcripts, October 23, 1967, Reel 4, page 2776, Kerner Commission Records.



immediately.<sup>71</sup> This bill would serve not only in the arena of politics but also as a basic psychological motivational tool for the black community, as well as some of white society. King recognized that psychological change would be a long-term process but for a community that had been ready for change for decades he believed the response would be a rapidly constructive one.<sup>72</sup>

As a believer in the government of the United States as a capable force for social change, Dr. King felt that civil rights laws were an essential part in mending race relations but their importance was contingent on their implementation. “If these laws aren’t going to be vigorously implemented then don’t pass them because they only increase the frustrations and the cynicism that we find existing in so many areas.”<sup>73</sup> At the foundation of all of these solutions was the ability to affect attitudinal change in white society through education.<sup>74</sup> King argued that through education and integration, prejudices would be unconsciously eliminated.

During the lengthy and respectful question and answer section of his hearing the General Counsel, Mr. McCurdy, questioned King about the riots taking place in areas that had received aid and areas that enjoyed progressive race relations. King argued that the gulf between black and white society, no matter how progressive the city, was still far too large and the African American community expressed great frustration over that gulf. He warned the Commission that there is “nothing more dangerous than to build a society with a large segment of people in that society who feel they have no stake in it.”<sup>75</sup> As his extensive hearing came to an end, King was thanked by several members of the Commission rather than just the standard dismissal usually

---

<sup>71</sup> Transcripts, October 23, 1967, Reel 4, page 2785, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>72</sup> Transcripts, October 23, 1967, Reel 4, page 2785, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>73</sup> Transcripts, October 23, 1967, Reel 4, page 2791, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>74</sup> Transcripts, October 23, 1967, Reel 4, page 2795, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>75</sup> Transcripts, October 23, 1967, Reel 4, page 2814, Kerner Commission Records.

given by Chairman Kerner.<sup>76</sup> He left the commission with concluding statements about the reordering of national priorities and a positive sentiment, “It isn’t an insoluble problem. It can be solved...”<sup>77</sup> King’s testimony provided the commission with the perspective of a black citizen and non-violent activist but with an academic structure. The Commission held King in high regard and the similarities within his presentation and the *Final Report*’s presentation is evidence of the influence his testimony had on their work.

Based on the testimony heard by the Commission throughout their meetings it is not surprising that the *Final Report* concluded that white racism was the basis for the riots and racial unrest in the United States. The commission recognized that the testimony they heard was wrapped in a “massive tangle of issues and circumstances” such as social, economic, political, and psychological issues but that these issues arise out of the historical pattern of discrimination against African Americans.<sup>78</sup> The *Report* goes on to explain that white racism was essentially responsible for the explosive mixture of the summer riots. While the conclusions of the report are written with strong rhetoric aimed at achieving the massive social change the Commission felt was needed, some of the phrasing ultimately did the Commission a disservice. Many people took the statements at face level, which led to an oversimplification of the commission’s findings.

As the Commission meetings came to an end, serious disagreement arose as members were forced to vote on specific policy recommendations.<sup>79</sup> Prior to these last few weeks, Commissioners had not been asked to take strict positions on policy recommendations. With a quickly approaching deadline the commission struggled with disagreements over specific recommendations. In an effort to produce a unified *Final Report* members were forced to

---

<sup>76</sup> Transcripts, October 23, 1967, Reel 4, page 2814, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>77</sup> Transcripts, October 23, 1967, Reel 4, page 2825, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>78</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 203.

<sup>79</sup> Michael Lipsky and David J. Olsen, *Commission Politics*, 224.

compromise and endorsed general recommendations rather than more specific policy recommendations, which sometimes detracted from their relevance in the eyes of critics. Capitalizing on this chaos Vice-Chairman Lindsay, notorious for his attempts to get the Commission to put forth strong policy recommendations, in their final weeks of deliberation proposed an introductory segment to the *Report* that he and his assistant had drafted in weeks prior.<sup>80</sup> Lindsay explained to fellow Commission members that their recommendations lacked focus and their *Report* needed an introduction to convey the “spirit and meaning” of the commissioner’s work.<sup>81</sup> In an effort to make the *Report* more hard-hitting, the introduction contained strong moralistic rhetoric, as well as some of the *Report*’s most famous quotations.

The public’s first impressions of the *Report* were molded by this introduction that stressed the important role that white racism played in the unrest. Undoubtedly, the *Report* and its recommendations read much differently without the introduction than they do with it.<sup>82</sup> However, the intense rhetoric in this section caused many people to believe that the Kerner Commission focused too much on blaming white racism and too little condemning the rioters for their lawless behavior. In reality, the report would say in Chapter Four that the white racism could be blamed only as an underlying cause for explosive mixture that culminated in the riots but it served not as a direct cause of the violence.<sup>83</sup>

Although Lindsay is credited with the moralistic rhetoric found in the introduction, the entire Commission agreed on some level with his conclusions, as evidenced by their unanimous vote to include it in the *Final Report*. Chairman Kerner strongly believed in the impact that white racism had on those that rioted. This is evidenced in a speech given by the Chairman in late

---

<sup>80</sup> Bruce R. Thomas, “The Kerner Commission: Remembering, Forgetting and Truth-Telling,” *Poverty and Race*, Vol. 17 (4) July/August 2008, 5.

<sup>81</sup> Bruce R. Thomas, “The Kerner Commission,” 5.

<sup>82</sup> Michael Lipsky and David J. Olsen, *Commission Politics*, 133.

<sup>83</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, Chapter 4.

September of 1967 when he set aside his prepared speech and spoke candidly with his audience on behalf of the African American communities he was studying.<sup>84</sup> He asked

How long would you and I control our tempers under the same circumstances?... Just because it's Labor Day don't think that it is over. Don't relax, because it is a year-round situation. Many affluent people are not aware that these conditions exist. If something is unpleasant, you put on blinders or refuse to see what is immediately in front of your face. If we are going to maintain law and order, if we are going to eliminate crime in our state, and if we are going to be the United States of America we believe we should be, we must look, we must see, and we must take action.<sup>85</sup>

In this statement, Chairman Kerner expressed his deep understanding of the complex nature of the violence at an early stage in their investigation.

Although, the high volume of attention dedicated to the strong moralistic concepts in the Introduction came as a surprise to many of the Kerner Commission members. Interviews with other commission members prove that many did not intend for the *Report* to be identified so strongly with solely the “white racism” theme.<sup>86</sup> This was largely due to press attention, as evidenced by the first two days of coverage on the *Report* being dedicated exclusively to the Introduction. Despite the controversy, Chairman Kerner refused to retract the general conclusion that white racism was the most major underlying cause of the rioting, even when doing so affected him negatively. He distinguished the two types of racism—purposeful white racism and subconscious systematic racism that was real and pervasive in American society. Throughout his political career, Kerner would defend the *Report* and its recommendations in its entirety.<sup>87</sup>

By listening to a range of testimonies that cited the same major concepts, commissioners were forced to face something no white citizen wanted to admit, that racism was ever-present in American society. Through their investigation the commission began to understand the damage

---

<sup>84</sup> Bill Barnhart and Gene Schlickman, *Kerner: The Conflict of Intangible Rights*, 214.

<sup>85</sup> Bill Barnhart and Gene Schlickman, *Kerner: The Conflict of Intangible Rights*, 214.

<sup>86</sup> Michael Lipsky and David J. Olsen, *Commission Politics*, 134.

<sup>87</sup> Bill Barnhart and Gene Schlickman, *Kerner: The Conflict of Intangible Rights*, 221-222.

both psychologically and physically that white racism had on the African American community. The goal of the *Report* was to present the culmination of the commission's experiences, investigation and evaluation in order to educate American society on race relations and to inform government policy. Many commission members were moderate to liberal which meant that often their findings confirmed or supported their liberal pre-existing beliefs, as evidenced by Lindsay's introduction. Unfortunately, only the education portion of their work would be liberal in nature. In respect to policy they endorsed general recommendations within pre-existing federal systems and initiatives. By focusing on reforming American attitudes rather than reforming the American institutional system, the Kerner Report advocated for the ideas associated with large-scale change without actually recommending revolutionizing institutional change in the United States. Regardless, the *Report* would remain an essential document in race discussions.

## **The Police and the Riots**

“Everywhere we went, we always asked the question of local people, ‘what do you think the President’s Commission ought to be doing or looking into particularly?’ ... and always the number one answer was, ‘the police.’”<sup>1</sup> This quote is taken from David Ginsburg, an influential member of the Commission research staff during a discussion of the member’s various tours in riot-torn cities. The *Final Report’s* Chapter Twelve titled “The Police and the Community” begins with a discussion of the police as a symbol for the African American community, a symbol of a much deeper issue than police brutality.<sup>2</sup> The chapter begins with the identification of the primary cause of the disorders as hostility between police and ghetto residents—“In practically every city that has experienced racial disorder since the summer of 1964—abrasive relationships between police and Negroes... have been a major source of grievance, tension, and ultimately disorder.”<sup>3</sup> Special consideration was given to the topic of police-community relations because in a majority of the racial disturbances the instigating factor was an incident between an inner-city resident and a police officer in which some sort of misconduct was alleged or witnessed. The longstanding history of bad relations between the African American population and law enforcement was even more reason for the Commission to further investigate the relationship and their role in the riots. Therefore, the *Final Report* considered various areas of improvement and made recommendations that ranged from attitudinal changes to guidelines for police practices.

In the *Final Report* the Commission made five basic recommendations based on problem areas in this relationship between police forces and African Americans or inner-city residents. The recommendations were the result of months of research, tours, and testimonies conducted by

---

<sup>1</sup> Transcripts, August 22, 1967, Reel 2, page 664, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>2</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 299.

<sup>3</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 299.

the Commission. The first was regarding the elimination of abrasive practices within police operations in the cities. The second called for more adequate police protection of inner-city residents to eliminate the high sense of insecurity. Thirdly, the Commission felt that citizens needed more effective mechanisms through which to have their grievances handled. Fourth, guidelines regarding police behavior and conduct, often the cause of tension between police and citizens, to assist police in these situations were found to be necessary. Lastly, the need to develop community support for law enforcement through better police-community relations was thought to improve the relationship between police and civil disorder.<sup>4</sup>

The African American community had experienced widespread violence in the South throughout the Civil Rights Movement. Violence was no surprise in the South where white supremacists groups reigned supreme, committing atrocities against the African American community, often with support from the authorities.<sup>5</sup> Many African Americans also experienced violence from the police force as a result of peaceful protests and demonstrations throughout the Civil Rights Movement and after. However, as the African American population began to migrate into Northern cities throughout the first half of the twentieth century, it was unclear if violence would continue in the North, a region with a much better reputation in race relations than the South. This question was soon answered for many inner-city residents—yes, violence would be part of their daily lives, even in the North.

Police practices in the North differed from those in the South largely in the lack of overt violence used in daily patrols. Northern police practices relied more on intimidation and casual violence to maintain order in the inner cities.<sup>6</sup> In the early 1960s, an African American activist group known as CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) began protesting with more frequency in

---

<sup>4</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 301.

<sup>5</sup> Malcolm McLaughlin, *The Long Hot Summer of 1967: Urban Rebellion in America*, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Malcolm McLaughlin, *The Long Hot Summer of 1967: Urban Rebellion in America*, 3.

New York and as a result conflicts with law enforcement and African Americans in the North increased in number.<sup>7</sup> Thus, violence seemed inevitable as the nation welcomed the summer months. In July of 1964, CORE focused their demonstrations on police brutality in Harlem after the shooting of a black teenager by an off-duty police lieutenant.<sup>8</sup> In the summers following 1964, urban areas experienced violence with increasing frequency and ferocity.

As the summer riots grew in prevalence many denounced the rioters as criminals but those who studied them often argued otherwise. The Kerner Commission would discover that rioters were often frustrated members of the African American community. While there were many reasons that participants stated they rioted, “above all what stirred anger was mistreatment at the hands of white police officers: intimidation, arbitrary arrest, beatings, a too-ready resort to the gun. The sense that white supremacy defined them out of American life.”<sup>9</sup> In this way, many rioters expressed a rejection of the authority of the very people they felt oppressed them—

Nowhere was the imbalance of power in urban America more searingly etched in day-to-day life than in the relationship between black communities and the police. The Kerner Commission researchers did not have to look far before they discovered why the police were so resented in Black communities.<sup>10</sup>

The Commission gave special consideration to their examination of the relationship between the African American community and the police, as evidenced by their extensive research, but not as clearly reflected in their rather minimized recommendations.

Racism within the police department was a prevalent finding in the Kerner Commission’s tours and field interviews. Commission researchers and staff members reported evidence of police brutality in both physical and verbal forms routinely after their tours. Field research notes from a trip to Tampa, Florida in regards to a police officer whom had a reputation for being a

---

<sup>7</sup> Malcolm McLaughlin, *The Long Hot Summer of 1967: Urban Rebellion in America*, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Malcolm McLaughlin, *The Long Hot Summer of 1967: Urban Rebellion in America*, 4.

<sup>9</sup> Malcolm McLaughlin, *The Long Hot Summer of 1967: Urban Rebellion in America*, 14.

<sup>10</sup> Malcolm McLaughlin, *The Long Hot Summer of 1967: Urban Rebellion in America*, 52.



“hard-core enforcer of the law” stated “Having had time to hear inspector Diamond and to understand his position in the police force, we would suspect that grievances against the police were in some measure justifiable.”<sup>11</sup> In Houston, Commission staff members reported hearing police officers referring to African Americans as “boy” and “nigger” regularly throughout their shifts.<sup>12</sup> The Commission found that these racist sentiments rightfully infuriated the African American communities, especially the younger generation. In addition to these experiences the Commission hired an outside research team supplement their findings with evidence from social science.

Robert Shellow, a social psychologist headed a research team with staff member Victor Palmieri. Shellow’s appointment to form a research team on behalf of the Commission was central to his special interest in police-community relations.<sup>13</sup> With the Commission’s goal of objectivity in mind, Shellow was an excellent choice to lead the research team as an unbiased expert in the field of police relations.<sup>14</sup> Shellow felt that within the field of race relations this was an opportunity for him to “inject into the national debate about race a new way of thinking that went beyond static liberal/conservative perspectives.”<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, the “Harvest of Racism” report that Shellow’s team produced would be rejected by the Commission because of its radical nature. Many of Shellow’s findings would be used to educate the Commissioners as they made their recommendations, but the team’s overall conclusions proved too radical for their complete inclusion in the *Report*. The “Harvest” conclusions seemed too radical partly, because President Johnson had pushed the Commission to limit the scope of their investigation from the beginning.

---

<sup>11</sup> Malcolm McLaughlin, *The Long Hot Summer of 1967: Urban Rebellion in America*, 53.

<sup>12</sup> Malcolm McLaughlin, *The Long Hot Summer of 1967: Urban Rebellion in America*, 53.

<sup>13</sup> Bill Barnhart and Gene Schlickman, *Kerner: The Conflict of Intangible Rights*, 205.

<sup>14</sup> Bill Barnhart and Gene Schlickman, *Kerner: The Conflict of Intangible Rights*, 205.

<sup>15</sup> Bill Barnhart and Gene Schlickman, *Kerner: The Conflict of Intangible Rights*, 204.

In his research, Shellow and his team sought to understand the dynamic between the police and inner-city residents based on an extensive-street level study they conducted.<sup>16</sup> They produced a social-science-based economic and demographic look at American inner cities. Their findings were culminated into a 176-page document that was titled “The Harvest of American Racism: The Political Meaning of Violence in the Summer of 1967”.<sup>17</sup> The team viewed the riots as action rather than reaction, which contradicted the concept that the riots started as a reaction to police incidents with inner city residents. The report argued that these expressions were overdue and to the Commission’s shock that they were actually positive political movements among America’s young black men.<sup>18</sup> This report succinctly explained everything the Commissioners had experienced on their tours and in hearing testimony but as a result of its radical conclusions, it was never published.

“The Harvest of American Racism” drew conclusions that would later be reflected in the *Final Report* and its recommendations. Despite its critique of the role of the police in the riots the “Harvest” did give considerable credit to the patience and professionalism that a large number of police officers managed to maintain in the face of extreme chaos and violence.<sup>19</sup> It did however, state that the exceptions to the rule of professionalism were unacceptable and needed to be improved upon through policy and police reform. This unprofessionalism occurred not only in high stress situations such as the riots but also in day-to-day interactions with inner-city residents. The report cited the major complaints of African American residents in regard to inadequate protection and police corruption. A very important concept to come from the “Harvest” research and report was the concept that within African American communities the

---

<sup>16</sup> Bill Barnhart and Gene Schlickman, *Kerner: The Conflict of Intangible Rights*, 205.

<sup>17</sup> Bill Barnhart and Gene Schlickman, *Kerner: The Conflict of Intangible Rights*, 206.

<sup>18</sup> Bill Barnhart and Gene Schlickman, *Kerner: The Conflict of Intangible Rights*, 206.

<sup>19</sup> David Boesel, et al., “The Harvest of American Racism: The Political Meaning of Violence in the Summer of 1967,” November 22, 1967, NAACD Series 7, box 1, LBJ Library, 36.

police were in a general sense symbols of white institutions that discriminated against blacks. The police were “conspicuous reminders of dominant white authority” and that officers took the “brunt of much hostility that might more logically be directed at the larger society and its less visible institutions.”<sup>20</sup> However, in their research Shellow’s team discovered a significant number of documented cases of physical and verbal abuse against African Americans by police.<sup>21</sup> While they recognized the potential for exaggeration in these complaints they did argue that it had a very real basis and was something that would need to be improved upon in order to prevent further riots. The report was never published although its basic conclusions formed the backdrop of the *Final Report*.<sup>22</sup>

The “Harvest” document put into words the impact that the Commissioner’s tours had on their *Final Report*. The Commissioners’ “minds and hearts were changed on the streets of the U.S. cities.”<sup>23</sup> These tours allowed Kerner and other commission members to hear firsthand from the people whose experiences and attitudes the ‘Harvest’ report revealed.”<sup>24</sup> As the work of the Commission intensified based on their strict timeline, the trips to the cities fostered an individualized understanding of the circumstances that produced the riots. This high level of exposure emboldened the Commission to step beyond the limited scope given to them by President Johnson, not in their recommendations, but in their moralistic introduction as they called for sweeping changes among American citizens’ attitudes.

The tours provided the Commissioners an experiential aspect of their investigation that was not quite produced by their hearings. In a sense, it leveled the playing field, if only for a

---

<sup>20</sup> David Boesel, et al., “The Harvest of American Racism,” November 22, 1967, NAACD Series 7, box 1, LBJ Library, 41.

<sup>21</sup> David Boesel, et al., “The Harvest of American Racism,” November 22, 1967, NAACD Series 7, box 1, LBJ Library, 42.

<sup>22</sup> Bill Barnhart and Gene Schlickman, *Kerner: The Conflict of Intangible Rights*, 206.

<sup>23</sup> Bill Barnhart and Gene Schlickman, *Kerner: The Conflict of Intangible Rights*, 209.

<sup>24</sup> Bill Barnhart and Gene Schlickman, *Kerner: The Conflict of Intangible Rights*, 209.

little while. The Commissioners were allowed to speak candidly and listen to the issues of the real and tangible people that would be affected by the success and accuracy of the recommendations in their *Report*. In a description of Kerner's trip to Newark in late September 1967, an interaction between the Chairman and inner city residents is noted.<sup>25</sup> In their tour of the Newark area, the Chairman and his staff members stopped to speak with people on Prince Street. The people mentioned the problems in which they regarded as the most important for the Commission's consideration. The very first issue mentioned in the conversation was "extreme police brutality."<sup>26</sup> Hearing repeatedly how important the issue of police practices were to the citizens in which it affected so greatly left a sense of urgency in the Commission as they executed their investigation. These same sentiments would be expressed in the testimonies heard by the Commission.

As a result of the Civil Rights Movement activists, the African American community had become increasingly comfortable with the expression of their frustrations with American society. Thus, the police became the target for these frustrations as the enforcers of this oppressive system. For this reason, the Commission found it of critical important that the police and society take the necessary steps to repair the relationship and system of law enforcement that directly affected the African American community and ghetto residents in particular.<sup>27</sup>

This concept of the police as a symbol of systematic white oppression for the African American community supplemented the "Harvest" findings as it was cited in several testimonies heard by the Commission over the course of their hearings. Many of the witnesses testified that the most basic tensions between the police and community were a result of their perception of the police rather than direct interactions. Deputy Attorney General of the United States, Warren

---

<sup>25</sup> Bill Barnhart and Gene Schlickman, *Kerner: The Conflict of Intangible Rights*, 210.

<sup>26</sup> Bill Barnhart and Gene Schlickman, *Kerner: The Conflict of Intangible Rights*, 210.

<sup>27</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 300.

Christopher, spent extensive time in Detroit observing the riots and their aftermath. In his report to the commission he made recommendations in reference to law enforcement.<sup>28</sup> He argued that more often than not the issues that residents had with police were larger than an individual incident of police brutality and more often representative of the police as a symbol of white oppression. John McCone from the McCone Commission, the commission that studied the Watts riots, testified that African American communities problems with the police department were “deep-seated within the community.”<sup>29</sup> During his testimony the Commission discussed their visit to Detroit and found that they encountered a similar sentiment when speaking with African American youths as they referenced disdain for the “white power structure.”<sup>30</sup> This contempt often manifested itself in interactions with law enforcement. Commissioners found that the white police system was often a symbol of this power that white society had disproportionate control over.

Kenneth Clark, found “a major source of cynicism, disrespect, hostility of ghetto residents toward the police.”<sup>31</sup> He argued that this perception resulted from young African Americans drawing connections from their oppression and frustration to visible police corruption in impoverished Black communities. Thus, these young residents viewed the police force as their corrupt oppressors, which fostered a sense of resentment and disdain within the African American community against the police. Clark was cited in the *Final Report* as he eloquently spoke on behalf of the populations he studied, “This society knows... that if human beings are confined in ghetto compounds of our cities, and are subjected to criminally inferior education, pervasive economic and job discrimination, committed to houses unfit for human habitation,

---

<sup>28</sup> Transcripts, August 1, 1967, Reel 1, page 46, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>29</sup> Transcripts, August 22, 1967, Reel 2, page 590, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>30</sup> Transcripts, August 22, 1967, Reel 2, page 721, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>31</sup> Transcripts, September 13, 1967, Reel 3, page 1283, Kerner Commission Records.

subjected to unspeakable conditions of municipal services, such as sanitation, that such human beings are not likely to be responsive to appeals to be lawful, to be respectful, to be concerned with the property of others.”<sup>32</sup> In this statement, Clark succinctly explains that the lack of response to the law enforcement by the African American community was the result of the disrespect they felt from white society and reluctance to follow laws in a society that was not benefiting them.

However, there were some who testified who discounted the existence of police brutality and argued that these complaints were productions of preconditioned biases of African Americans against police officers. Wilson Purdy, Director of Public Safety of New York City, argued that the tremendous press coverage received by the Civil Rights Movement did not accurately portray for the rest of the United States the amount of support and protection activists received from various law enforcement agencies.<sup>33</sup> The coverage highlighted abuses by Southern police and was not representative of the role of law enforcement in the movement. He argued that there were some “isolated instances of excesses” but argued that the majority of “the police family was in staunch support of the principle of the civil rights movement.”<sup>34</sup> He even went as far as to say that the race relations and riots had not developed because of police brutality—“we went through an era where no matter what action you took, you could send troops in armed with Bibles and still have accusations of police brutality.”<sup>35</sup> His administration saw it not as a police problem but rather an attitudinal problem within the African American community because of the role that police officers played in their lives, as the enforcers of what they felt were unjust

---

<sup>32</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 300.

<sup>33</sup> Transcripts, September 20, 1967, Reel 3, page 1294, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>34</sup> Transcripts, September 20, 1967, Reel 3, page 1294, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>35</sup> Transcripts, September 20, 1967, Reel 3, page 1295, Kerner Commission Records.

practices.<sup>36</sup> This relates back to the perception of police being skewed as a result of their symbolic meaning rather than their actions. However, the tangible actions of police officers did pose an issue for many in the African American community.

Citations of physical abuse were an important complaint in a majority of the cities surveyed but the complaints of harassment were just as prevalent and important. The Commission concluded that these racist sentiments among police officers “stripped the Negro of the one thing that he may have left—his dignity.”<sup>37</sup> Several testimonies could have contributed to this conclusion, namely the emotional recollections of discrimination by police. Father Groppi, who delivered a passionate testimony on behalf of the effects that white racism had on the civil rights movement and the daily lives of African Americans, spoke about his experiences with police officers in Milwaukee. The week prior to his testimony he was arrested for violating the Mayor’s proclamation against protests and during his arrest he told the Commission that he was referred to as “literally a fuckin’ white nigger” by the police officers who conducted his arrest.<sup>38</sup> Other members of the Youth Council, a civil rights activist group of which Groppi was a member, were arrested alongside him and even one young person was put in the same wagon. The young man was “bleeding” as the result of an assault by a “billy club” and “blood was running down the side of his face and on his shirt” according to Groppi. As he sat side by side with the injured young man he heard the police officer shout to the other officer in the front of the wagon to “kill the dirty black bastards, shoot the black bastards. Kill them.”<sup>39</sup> Groppi found that this type of behavior was common in the Milwaukee police department and that their attitudes toward the black community were expressed in overtly racist ways.

---

<sup>36</sup> Transcripts, September 20, 1967, Reel 3, page 1296, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>37</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 303.

<sup>38</sup> Transcripts, September 21, 1967, Reel 3, page 1520, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>39</sup> Transcripts, September 21, 1967, Reel 3, page 1520, Kerner Commission Records.

Groppi also recalled the for the Commission that he and his Youth Council members had been intensely followed by the Milwaukee police department for three months prior to his arrest.<sup>40</sup> In an ideal world the youth council could have utilized the police department to protect them throughout their peaceful demonstrations, and Groppi expressed gratitude for the small number of officers that did protect them for a time. However, eventually white racists retaliated with violence during these peaceful protests by calling them “niggers and black bastards,” telling them to “go back to Africa” and by throwing rocks at the demonstrators.<sup>41</sup> Instead of the white racists that interrupted their protests being punished, the Mayor made a proclamation that took the activists’ right to demonstrate away. Thus, Groppi testified that he and his fellow activists have lost faith in the effect that marching and demonstrating can have in affecting social change.<sup>42</sup> These negative experiences with police officers shaped the way that Groppi felt about the riots. While he did not advocate for violence, it influenced his opinion about the necessity of the disturbances. Ernie Chambers supported Groppi’s testimony when he said “we have exhausted every means of getting redress and it has not come. We are tired of having our people get killed.”<sup>43</sup> As a result of their negative experiences with the police department, Groppi and Chambers’ testimonies reflected a common belief among the African American community that the police were to blame for many of the issues they faced.

In contrast to the emotional testimonies heard from those that had experienced police brutality firsthand, the Commission heard from several police officials that defended police practices and the efficiency of law enforcement. Howard Leary, Police Commissioner of New York City, cited the success that civilian review boards had in Philadelphia in proving that police

---

<sup>40</sup> Transcripts, September 21, 1967, Reel 3, page 1522, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>41</sup> Transcripts, September 21, 1967, Reel 3, page 1528, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>42</sup> Transcripts, September 21, 1967, Reel 3, page 1531, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>43</sup> Transcripts, September 21, 1967, Reel 3, page 1549, Kerner Commission Records.



brutality was not practiced to the degree that most advocates of the civilian review board had believed.<sup>44</sup> They found that often in police citizen interactions the situation would be a back and forth that eventually fostered irritation in the police officer. This irritation would eventually turn into a “degree of excessive, physical force... something like squeezing too hard.”<sup>45</sup> In his testimony, Leary devalued the severity of the police’s use of physical force. In a similar vein of thought, Mayor Whelan of Jersey City commented on a University of California, Los Angeles study that would later be cited in the *Final Report*, in his testimony and criticized it for asking “open-ended questions” which he felt skewed the definition of police brutality in respondents’ answers. He felt this allowed the report to draw the conclusion that these responses would “imply widespread grievances against the police.”<sup>46</sup> He then cited a nationwide Gallup poll in which only fourteen percent of African Americans believed that police brutality existed in their area. However, the opinion of law enforcement officials and the minimal data used as evidence by Mayor Whelan could not replace the abundance of data that was analyzed by the Commission research staff and the information the Commission members gained in their tours.

Although those who testified on behalf of the police department were reluctant to admit that police brutality existed to the extent that many African Americans believed, in addition to testimony from those affected by police brutality the Commission also heard testimony from social scientists that studied police practices. Professor Albert J. Reiss, Jr., Professor of Sociology at University of Michigan delivered an influential testimony based on his own research that he had completed for the National Science Foundation and President Johnson’s Commission for Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice.<sup>47</sup> Reiss was internationally

---

<sup>44</sup> Transcripts, September 20, 1967, Reel 3, page 1372, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>45</sup> Transcripts, September 20, 1967, Reel 3, page 1295, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>46</sup> Transcripts, October 5, 1967, Reel 4, page 1967, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>47</sup> Transcripts, September 21, 1967, Reel 3, page 1662, Kerner Commission Records.

recognized for his groundbreaking sociological research that began with his study of police behavior in his 1967 work *Studies on Crime and Law Enforcement*.<sup>48</sup> Reiss was even directly quoted in Chapter 12 of the *Final Report* when the Commission analyzed police practices as a factor of the poor race relations that led to the riots and made recommendations for future practice. He found that pervasive racism within the police forces fostered the conditions necessary for the violent riots—

In predominantly Negro precincts, over three-fourths of the white policemen expressed prejudice or highly prejudiced attitudes towards Negroes. Only one percent of the officers expressed attitudes, which could be described as sympathetic towards Negroes. Indeed, close to one-half of all the police officers in predominantly Negro high crime rate areas showed extreme prejudice against Negroes. What do I mean by extreme racial prejudice? I mean that they describe Negroes in terms that were not people terms. They describe them in terms of the animal kingdom...

In his testimony Professor Reiss limited himself to speaking on the role of police in the disorders with a focus on police-community relations.<sup>49</sup> In his research he found that police were consistently more positive in interactions with white citizens than with black citizens.<sup>50</sup> Reiss shared some statistics he had gathered in his research and expressed shock to the Commission when reporting his findings on the prejudices of the police department. He found through field research that when African Americans residents of riot areas were questioned about their experiences with the police department prior to the riot, close to two-thirds responded that they had observed what they defined as improper police conduct.<sup>51</sup> These improper behaviors were often verbal remarks, seemingly unreasonable searches, or unnecessary force used in arrests. In his testimony Reiss supported his statistics with his personal opinion in their relevance stating, “I

---

<sup>48</sup> “Albert Reiss Jr.; Coined ‘Proactive’ During Police Experiment,” *The Washington Post*, Obituaries, 2006, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/05/04/AR2006050402114.html>.

<sup>49</sup> Transcripts, September 21, 1967, Reel 3, page 1661, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>50</sup> Transcripts, September 21, 1967, Reel 3, page 1664, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>51</sup> Transcripts, September 21, 1967, Reel 3, page 1675, Kerner Commission Records.

do not think we are in a place to discount the claims of Negro citizens.”<sup>52</sup> He concluded his argument with a recommendation for a zero toleration policy in regard to police discrimination, hostility, or brutality against any citizens.<sup>53</sup>

The second major criticisms expressed by African American residents was that they felt “police treat complaints and calls for help from Negro areas much less urgently than from white areas.”<sup>54</sup> Discontent with police response times in emergency situations in majority black urban neighborhoods compared to the response times in majority white neighborhoods was often cited amongst African Americans.<sup>55</sup> Many felt that “black people... are dealt with in a different way than a white man.”<sup>56</sup> This fostered an enormous feeling of resentment in many of the communities that experienced riots and was often cited as a reason for the disturbances.

Kenneth Clark also testified that in his experience ghetto residents did not have adequate police protection as long as crimes were “inner-ghetto issues,” meaning that both victim and perpetrator were ghetto residents. He found that police became efficient only when the crimes affected those outside of the ghetto.<sup>57</sup> The locals also felt that there was a “double standard of justice” between black and white America.<sup>58</sup> A significant portion of the *Final Report* is dedicated to police guidelines for the future in order to alleviate these frustrations caused by police department negligence.

A third source of tension between African American communities and the police force was in regard to their lack of effective communication when filing complaints against police misconduct. The Commission evaluated this as a serious concern based on research and as a

---

<sup>52</sup> Transcripts, September 21, 1967, Reel 3, page 1676, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>53</sup> Transcripts, September 21, 1967, Reel 3, page 1769, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>54</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 307.

<sup>55</sup> Transcripts, September 12, 1967, Reel 2, page 862, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>56</sup> Transcripts, September 12, 1967, Reel 2, page 862, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>57</sup> Transcripts, September 13, 1967, Reel 3, page 1282-83, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>58</sup> Transcripts, September 12, 1967, Reel 2, page 862, Kerner Commission Records.

result of various testimonies that cited inadequate outlets for citizen complaints as a major police-citizen issue. In terms of improving communication, the most basic concern was to adopt procedures that allow for the gaining of mutual respect and the confidence of the entire community in the police department.<sup>59</sup>

In the aftermath of the increasingly frequent riots, it became painfully obvious to many in law enforcement that their initiatives to gain citizen perspective and support were not effective. In speaking with the Detroit Police Commissioner, Ray Girardin, the Commission heard his opinion on the handling of grievances in Detroit, an obviously turbulent area. Girardin did express that prior to the riots, most of his administration had believed that communication lines between the community and the police department were good.<sup>60</sup> After the outbreak of violence in Detroit it became clear that this was not true. The department had received 104 complaints of police brutality in 1966 and Girardin went on to explain how Detroit handled the complaint process.<sup>61</sup> Detroit utilized the Citizens Complaints Bureau of Police Officers, an agency that Girard testified, was completely integrated and approachable due to the fact that most worked in civilian clothing.<sup>62</sup> This was a place where citizens could relax and tell their story in an unintimidating environment. He testified that this bureau, comprised of police officers of various rankings, investigated in detail every complaint received.<sup>63</sup> The report was given to Police Commissioner Girardin in writing and then whatever action the Bureau felt necessary is taken. Penalties ranged from verbal reprimands to firings.<sup>64</sup> Girardin also found that complaints had increased over the years because they had “encouraged the complaint and people know they are

---

<sup>59</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 312.

<sup>60</sup> Transcripts, August 15, 1967, Reel 2, page 468, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>61</sup> Transcripts, August 15, 1967, Reel 2, page 490, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>62</sup> Transcripts, August 15, 1967, Reel 2, page 490, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>63</sup> Transcripts, August 15, 1967, Reel 2, page 491, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>64</sup> Transcripts, August 15, 1967, Reel 2, page 492, Kerner Commission Records.

going to get action.”<sup>65</sup> While the complaints had increased in quantity the content was often “less serious” such as a verbal misunderstanding.<sup>66</sup> This testimony most likely influenced the recommendation that called for “a built in conciliation process to attempt to resolve complaints without a full investigation and processing.”<sup>67</sup> This process was an effort to solve minor verbal discretions without full investigation and quick visible punishment for the officer if found guilty.

Detroit was not the only city with a police department that believed they were effective until the riots occurred. Chief William Lombard, of the Rochester Police Department, also spoke to the Commission about the processing of citizen complaints and internal inspections in his administration.<sup>68</sup> Rochester, which also experienced riots, had no formal program for grievance handling. All complaints were processed by a staff of five in the Internal Inspection Office of the police department.<sup>69</sup> He found that while officers first resented the office it quickly earned officers’ faith and respect. He felt that the program had “played a foremost part in improving the character, performance and attitude of our organization.”<sup>70</sup> While the Commission expressed gratitude for these testimonies and treated the witnesses with the same respect as all others, these two testimonies proved to be inconsistent with other testimony and the general consensus of African American communities that were surveyed or spoken to by the Commission and its staff. The belief that all that could be done, was being done did not seem an adequate claim when the Commission was constantly being met with these widespread complaints about police practices. This notion is further expressed in Oliver Lofton’s testimony.

---

<sup>65</sup> Transcripts, August 15, 1967, Reel 2, page 492, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>66</sup> Transcripts, August 15, 1967, Reel 2, page 494, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>67</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 311.

<sup>68</sup> Transcripts, September 20, 1967, Reel 3, page 1304, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>69</sup> Transcripts, September 20, 1967, Reel 3, page 1310, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>70</sup> Transcripts, September 20, 1967, Reel 3, page 1310, Kerner Commission Records.

In contrast to these self-proclaimed “successful” complaint-handling systems, Oliver Lofton, legal services expert for the city of Newark, criticized the processing of citizen complaints in Newark. On the Commissioner’s tour of Newark he discussed with them the lack of action taken in response to citizen complaints.<sup>71</sup> He found that he had more recently received a diminishing number of complaints, as people “understand that it does not do much good.”<sup>72</sup> His clients expressed a lack of faith in the police department as a result of not seeing the visible consequences or punishment of specific police officers as a result of their complaints. Mr. McCone from the McCone Commission made a recommendation concerning this topic as well. He specifically focused on need to process complaints in a visible manner.<sup>73</sup> This was an important aspect of the grievance filing process because of the immense power and authority given to the police department in American society as a whole.

The Police Department, as an institution enjoyed a certain amount of autonomy by society in general. Patrick V. Murphy, Assistant Director of Law Enforcement in the Justice Department, criticized police departments for becoming “inbred” and “backward” as a result of the autonomy granted to police departments in the administration of justice.<sup>74</sup> This statement likely had influence on one of the four recommendations made by the Commission in regard to grievance handlings, that called for the creation of an agency with internal and external municipal agency participation whose jobs are to investigate and make recommendations based on each citizen complaint.<sup>75</sup>

In addition to hearing grievances, the Commission welcomed potential recommendations from those giving testimony on improving police and community relations. Quinn Tam,

---

<sup>71</sup> Transcripts, August 22, 1967, Reel 2, page 657, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>72</sup> Transcripts, August 22, 1967, Reel 2, page 657, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>73</sup> Transcripts, August 22, 1967, Reel 2, page 589, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>74</sup> Transcripts, September 22, 1967, Reel 3, page 1788-1789, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>75</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 311.

Executive Director, International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), and a former assistant director of the FBI, testified not on the inefficiency of the police complaint processing but in their failure to make it known to the community that they are taking action.<sup>76</sup> In his experience in major cities, “the principal problem is not that they are ignoring them or sweeping them under the carpet, but it is that they are appearing to do this.”<sup>77</sup> He felt that the best way to bridge this gap was to make the filing of complaints very easy and allow for maximum opportunity for citizen participation so that consequences are very visible.<sup>78</sup>

The Commission clearly valued Tam’s conclusions, as one of their recommendations proposed that complaint filing should be “without excessive formality” and as easy as possible.<sup>79</sup> Tam also influenced the last recommendation, which focused on the complainant’s participation in the investigation process.<sup>80</sup> Tam’s suggestion, combined with the fact that the two systems previously cited by the testimonies of Girardin and Lombard had no element of community participation, made this recommendation a Commission priority. These two recommendations demonstrate the influence of these testimonies on the Commission’s assessment. The testimonies contained a relatively narrow procedural solution to fix a tangible problem rather than an attitudinal issue within the community. Thus the Commission based their recommendations on the visible failures of the current systems that were explained in the testimonies of the police officials and the suggestions made by those that testified.

A fourth problem in police-community relations centered around the lack of community support for law enforcement.<sup>81</sup> The Deputy Attorney General, Warren Christopher, was the first

---

<sup>76</sup> Transcripts, September 22, 1967, Reel 3, page 1770, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>77</sup> Transcripts, September 22, 1967, Reel 3, page 1770, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>78</sup> Transcripts, September 22, 1967, Reel 3, page 1770-1772, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>79</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 311.

<sup>80</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 311.

<sup>81</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 301.

of many to testify regarding the necessity of a good relationship between the community and the police. He felt that community involvement allowed citizens to “get out of their system” the way they felt about the police.<sup>82</sup> The *Final Report* notes that many police departments had established programs to deal specifically with police-community issues and that some had relative success.<sup>83</sup> Dominick H. Spina, Police Director of Newark New Jersey, spoke with the Commission about the police-community relation’s initiatives that had been underway in Newark. He found that Police Precinct Councils had programs that proved very helpful in discussing mutual problems and solutions.<sup>84</sup> As the police department attempted to understand citizens’ frustrations they instituted various programs such as summer recreation programs in an attempt to foster more positive police-community relationships.<sup>85</sup> They found their most successful program was their “Citizen Observer Program” which permitted any citizen or civil rights leader, even the media, to see the actual operations of the police force in order to better understand their jobs.<sup>86</sup>

Abrasive police practices in interactions with the African American communities were often the cited by rioters as the primary cause of the riots and for this reason a very sensible topic for a first recommendation in the *Final Report*. In the first part of this chapter—“Police Conduct and Patrol Practices”<sup>87</sup> the Commission discusses the complaint of frequent police brutality as a result of discrimination. The *Final Report*’s temperate language did not fully represent the ingrained culture of racism and police brutality that their investigation revealed was prevalent in police departments. Thus, the Kerner Commission censored their recommendations to focus on “the few” despite testimony and tours where police brutality was widely encountered and cited.

---

<sup>82</sup> Transcripts, August 1, 1967, Reel 1, page 46, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>83</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 319.

<sup>84</sup> Transcripts, August 22, 1967, Reel 2, page 775-776, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>85</sup> Transcripts, August 22, 1967, Reel 2, page 778, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>86</sup> Transcripts, August 22, 1967, Reel 2, page 778, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>87</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 301.



Based on the assumption that American institutions were strong and amendable, the Commission focused its recommendations on individuals rather than on police culture as a whole. Thus, the conclusion that the improper acts of “the relatively few officers” might have created the tensions that led to the breakdown of the relationship between the police force and the African American community is not surprising.<sup>88</sup>

The *Final Report* also notes that the increase in “harassment” complaints may be a result of increased police presence and professionalization. In order to meet quotas, police officers were required to perform an allotted amount of street stops or searches each day.<sup>89</sup> This segment of the chapter concludes with recommendations made by the Commission to improve the conditions related to police brutality and conduct in African American communities. The first demands that police misconduct, whether it be brutality or harassment in the form of physical abuse or verbal discourtesy not be tolerated in any circumstance.<sup>90</sup> The commission advocated for extreme care in selecting police who would patrol ghetto areas—reassigning officers with bad reputations among residents to other areas.<sup>91</sup> This selection process would be accomplished through screening procedures to ensure the officer had the sensitivity and commonsense necessary for law enforcement in ghetto areas.<sup>92</sup> “These recommendations are designed to ensure proper police conduct in minority areas,” only these procedures did not on their own eliminate the negative perception that African Americans had of police and police practices. As a result of targeting individuals in their recommendations, the Kerner Commission viewed racism in a much too simplistic way and police brutality would persist despite their *Final Report*.

---

<sup>88</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 304.

<sup>89</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 304.

<sup>90</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 306.

<sup>91</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 306.

<sup>92</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 306.

The Commission also recognized the need for more equal proportions of protection between African American ghettos and white communities. The evaluation of police protection in the ghetto began with— “The strength of ghetto feelings about hostile police conduct may even be exceeded by the conviction that ghetto neighborhoods are not given adequate police protection.”<sup>93</sup> The Commission found there to be two types of complaints regarding police protection in African American communities. The first was an issue with the police enforcing a much lower standard of adherence to the law in these communities and tolerating illegal activities to a greater extent than they would elsewhere.<sup>94</sup> This first type of criticism was demonstrated in the discussion of the Commissioner’s visit to Detroit. The Commissioners found in their conversations with African Americans in Detroit that a main criticism of the police force among adults in the inner city was the “laxity in enforcing the laws in their communities.”<sup>95</sup> Members found it to be a common complaint that the police were too lenient in their punishment of criminals, which led residents to believe that corruption was widespread.<sup>96</sup> The citizens were frustrated and felt that they were not getting the law and order that they deserved from the police.

In response to these widespread criticisms of inadequate police protection the Commission made two recommendations. The first was that “police departments should have a clear and enforced policy that the standard of law-enforcement in ghetto areas is the same as in other communities; complaints and appeals from the ghetto should be treated with the same urgency as those from white neighborhoods.”<sup>97</sup> The second referenced the basic problem of not having enough police to protect and serve the inner-city residents; therefore the Commission

---

<sup>93</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 307.

<sup>94</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 307.

<sup>95</sup> Transcripts, August 22, 1967, Reel 2, page 677, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>96</sup> Transcripts, August 22, 1967, Reel 2, page 677, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>97</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 309.

recommended an analysis of “existing deployment of field personnel to ensure the most efficient use of manpower.”<sup>98</sup>

Despite testimony that claimed success in police-community relations initiatives the Commission stated in the *Final Report* that these programs had great potential benefit but the majority delivered relatively disappointing results.<sup>99</sup> This allowed the Commission to praise the police departments for their efforts, while criticizing them, in hopes that their recognition of these efforts would lead to greater influence of their recommendations. The Commission made several conclusions regarding police-community relations and recommendations for future progress in this area. The first being that “community relations programs and training can be important in increasing communication and decreasing hostility between the police and the ghetto.”<sup>100</sup> Testimony from Calvin West, City Councilman of Newark New Jersey, touched on the importance of increased communication between the community and police. Police Director Spina of Newark supported Councilman West but also expressed the difficulty in creating the relations necessary to foster positive feelings within the police forces and communities.<sup>101</sup>

These recommended programs could be used to explain “new patrol practices, law-enforcement programs and other police efforts to reduce crime.”<sup>102</sup> The Commission also believed that these programs could foster relationships between citizen leaders and police forces that would result in reduced crime. The *Final Report* stressed that as these programs were an integral part of the success of law-enforcement in African American communities it was important to recognize the “cognizance of the work of officers who improved relations with

---

<sup>98</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 309.

<sup>99</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 319-320.

<sup>100</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 319-320.

<sup>101</sup> Transcripts, September 12, 1967, Reel 2, page 773, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>102</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 319-320.

alienated members of the community.”<sup>103</sup> This system would reward those who proved to be interested in fostering positive community relationships with the police department. The Commissions concluded that there was “no easy solution to police community relations and misunderstandings and ... no single procedural program will suffice.”<sup>104</sup> Improving relations would be a full time job for all involved but one that would pay great dividends in the long-term if relations were mended and communication lines opened.

Lastly, the *Report* addressed the need for guidelines of police conduct. The Commission found that day-to-day interactions in African American communities involved judgment and discretion on the individual police officer’s part but recommended that these judgments should be based upon “carefully-drawn, written departmental policy.”<sup>105</sup> The Commission felt that these guidelines should cover at a minimum: the issuance of orders regarding citizen activities, handling of minor disputes, the decision whether to arrest in victimless but illegal crimes, and the selection and use of investigative methods.<sup>106</sup> Investigative methods in particular were discussed at length due to the controversial nature of “stop and frisk” practices that Professor Reiss’ testimony referenced. When asked on his views of “stop and frisk” practices, Reiss cited some of his published data from an observational study.<sup>107</sup> Reiss found that these practices had largely become a minority group problem and less of a white citizen problem.<sup>108</sup> This is partly due to the “stereotype that more Negroes than other citizens in the society are apt to be criminals.”<sup>109</sup> Reiss concluded this discussion by explaining that many African Americans were aware that they are

---

<sup>103</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 319-320.

<sup>104</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 319-320.

<sup>105</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 313.

<sup>106</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 313.

<sup>107</sup> Transcripts, September 21, 1967, Reel 3, page 1717, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>108</sup> Transcripts, September 21, 1967, Reel 3, page 1720, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>109</sup> Transcripts, September 21, 1967, Reel 3, page 1720, Kerner Commission Records.

disproportionately subjected to these practices, which fostered even more resentment among the black community.<sup>110</sup>

The *Final Report* stressed that the police placed priority in “safeguarding the constitutional right of free expression such as rights of persons engaging in lawful demonstrations.”<sup>111</sup> The guidelines should also include express circumstances in which various forms of physical force are appropriate in contact with any citizen.<sup>112</sup> These provisions could be the result of the emotional depictions of police brutality faced by Civil Rights activists in Father Groppi’s testimony.<sup>113</sup> The Commission advocated for the shared responsibility of these guidelines between police departments and various elected or appointed officials.<sup>114</sup> They concluded by stressing the necessity that was enforcing these guidelines in all departments in all of the nation’s cities. A result of the pleas for action on behalf of many of the citizen testimonies heard throughout their hearings.

Exploring the relationship between the police and the African American community was a significant element in the Kerner Commission’s investigation and *Final Report*. In the end, the Commission chose to advocate for individualized police reform rather than an examination of the culture within the institution of law enforcement in regard to race. The *Report* does criticize police practices and call for reform in the problem areas they identified, but it is a mix of praise and criticism that does not accurately reflect the testimony and stories of police brutality the Commission heard throughout their investigation. Their criticisms and recommendations for law enforcement were carefully worded as to not give police departments a reason to ignore their recommendations or to upset major American institutions. While the recommendations did not

---

<sup>110</sup> Transcripts, September 21, 1967, Reel 3, page 1728, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>111</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 319.

<sup>112</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 319.

<sup>113</sup> Transcripts, September 21, 1967, Reel 3, page 518-532, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>114</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 319.

call for institutional restructuring, they did have some influence. Their conclusions spurred a reexamination of police practices that led to some positive changes in the police departments conduct. Although as evidenced by modern day issues, the relationship between the police and the African American community is still a strained one at best.

## The Media and Riots

“All I mean to do, and what I am trying to do, is to remind you where there is great power, there must also be great responsibility. This is true for broadcasters, just as it is true for Presidents.”<sup>1</sup> This statement by President Johnson in Chicago in April of 1968, before the National Association of Broadcasters speaks to the President’s view on the increasingly influential mass media; specifically their responsibility in reporting truthful segments about the riots. This was an important factor in the Kerner Commission’s investigation of the summer riots because it was a widespread belief at the time that the media contributed to the urban violence. Issues with the media concerned sensationalized and inaccurate riot coverage and inadequate coverage of the African American experience in American society. The Commission devoted Chapter Fifteen to its assessment of the media’s role in the disturbances and their recommendations for future media activities. Despite heavy criticism on both ends of the political spectrum for the Commission’s *Final Report*, it has proved to have both immediate and long-term effects on media practices and race. Its recommendations forced the media to evaluate its practices and “pressures to reform the news media followed... The Kerner Report quickened a conversation among journalists about race, responsibility, and ethics.”<sup>2</sup>

As the Watts riot came to a close in the Summer of 1965 the media’s role in race issues became more apparent. Media coverage of the riots quickly became an issue for law enforcement and the African American community. The media’s portrayal of the riots affected how American society would learn about riots and would affect their perception of rioters in the African American community and law enforcement. Los Angeles Police Chief William Parker was one

---

<sup>1</sup> Remarks in Chicago Before the National Association of Broadcasters, April 1, 1968, Public Papers of the Presidents, Lyndon Johnson, [www.presidency.ucsb.edu/lyndon\\_johnson](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/lyndon_johnson), (accessed February 8, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Glen Feighery “Conscience of the Calling: How Journalists used Three National Commissions to Blend a New Professional Ethic, 1963-1975” (PhD dissertation, University of North Carolina, 2004), 139.

of the first to publicly acknowledge the frustrations inherent to media disturbance reporting stating, “I told them they were complicating our jobs but who am I to interfere with the great freedom of the press!”<sup>3</sup> Complaints from police officers were common because of the nature of media reporting. It was inherent to media practices to get in the midst of the chaos, which made it more difficult for the police to do their job of protection and keep order. As a result it quickly became a common belief that the news media contributed to or even encouraged violence in rioting African American communities. Critics argued that this was done in a number of ways ranging from sensationalizing violence in the news, giving an inordinate amount of time to black militants, or portraying a scene from the riot out of context for dramatic effect. In this way, the news media garnered much criticism from both the public and the government.<sup>4</sup> This relationship between the news media and the urban upheaval became part of the Kerner Commission’s investigation because it was one of President Johnson’s greatest interests, specifically asking them, “What effect do mass media have on the riots?”<sup>5</sup> Although Johnson did not outline specific expectations or methods for the Kerner Commission in their exploration of this relationship he did strongly believe that the media, specifically television as an up and coming medium, had immense influence over public life.<sup>6</sup> This is evidenced through various comments by staff in his administration that claimed the President was “not just interested in the mass media, he was obsessed.”<sup>7</sup> A popular image of the President pictures him at his desk surrounded by televisions, all tuned into the news.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Robert Conot, *Rivers of Blood, Years of Darkness* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967), 244.

<sup>4</sup> Woody Klein, “Crisis in America: The News Media Respond to the New Challenge,” *Quill*, January 1969, 10.

<sup>5</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1968), 362.

<sup>6</sup> Remarks Upon Signing the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, November 7, 1967, Public Papers of the Presidents, Lyndon Johnson, [www.presidency.ucsb.edu/lyndon\\_johnson](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/lyndon_johnson), (accessed February 9, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Hrach, “The News Media and the Disorders,” 28.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Hrach, “The News Media and the Disorders,” 28.



With the popularization of television in the late 1950s, mass media became even more influential in the formation of public opinion about important issues such as race. Therefore, it bore much of the criticism of the media when it came to race.<sup>9</sup> The criticism of television was a racially divided issue, with black and white perception differing greatly on its advantages and limitations. Whites tended to see the media as being manipulated by the minority of black militant aggressors and blacks tended to view the media as another channel of oppression via white society.<sup>10</sup> The Commission was not immune to these variations in opinion regarding the media, but in order to produce a widely accepted and accurate *Final Report*, personal opinions had to be supported with research findings. Although all commission members were involved in the investigation, writing, and approval of the media chapter there were four members and two staff members that impacted the chapter the most. The member with the most influence on the overall reception of the chapter and therefore its influence would prove to be Chairman Kerner.

Kerner's relationship with the media would prove to be significant for the acceptance of the *Final Report's* recommendations and its influence on media practices. Kerner was well liked and respected by the news media; he embodied the straightforward political leader that the media favored throughout this turbulent period in American politics. Kerner demonstrated a thorough understanding of the influence of the media and its possibility as a force for positive change throughout his political career. As a result of this, he spent a great deal of time focusing on developing a relationship with the press in response to the coverage of various issues.<sup>11</sup> This knowledge and understanding of the media would benefit Kerner greatly throughout the Commission's investigation.

---

<sup>9</sup> "The Most Intimate Medium," *Time*, October 14, 1966, 56.

<sup>10</sup> Terry Ann Knopf, *Rumors, Race and Riots*, (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1975), 291.

<sup>11</sup> "Kerner of Illinois," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 8, 1962

Vice-chairman Lindsay's relationship with the media was of a much different nature. Mayor Lindsay was infamous for enjoying the publicity that came with his job but was known to be rather sensitive to criticism. This relationship is exemplified in an interaction between Lindsay and the press that took place in March of 1966, in which Lindsay responded to aggressive reporters by saying, "I don't have to talk to you—I am the mayor and you have the obligation to treat me with respect."<sup>12</sup> Lindsay would develop a better tolerance of the media as he became more politically seasoned and the relationship had markedly improved by the time he became Vice-Chairman of the Commission. Lindsay would be one of the most influential members of the commission for the media chapter, second to Chairman Kerner.

Both Roy Wilkins and Katherine Peden had professional experience with the media as well. Wilkins had previously been the editor and reporter for two black newspapers and Peden was the owner of a Kentucky radio station.<sup>13</sup> With the confidence that comes with experience, both members were especially vocal in writing the media chapter of the *Final Report*. Wilkins embodied a moderate critic by expressing more general criticisms of the media that were often prefaced with praise. However, Peden became the most critical of the ways in which media covered the riots, she would even go on to reject the first draft of the Commission's chapter as being "too soft."<sup>14</sup> Peden's criticisms stemmed from her strong belief that the presence of the media, specifically television cameras, exacerbated the violence of the riots.<sup>15</sup> Her strong opinions on the news media may have resulted from her background in radio, which was becoming outpaced in popularity by television. The commission members were not the only people that had influence on the media chapter. Two staff members, David Ginsburg and Alvin

---

<sup>12</sup> Vincent J. Cannato, *The Ungovernable City*, 114-115.

<sup>13</sup> "Katherine Peden 80; Broadcaster Served on Panel Studying Riots," *Los Angeles Times*, January 12, 2006.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Hrach, "The News Media and the Disorders," Interview with Alvin Spivak, December 12, 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Hrach, "The News Media and the Disorders," 86.

Spivak, and a hired consultant, Abram Chayes, did much of the research and actual first draft of the chapter that the commission would evaluate and edit.<sup>16</sup> Ginsburg was later quoted saying that the media chapter was “one of the best... in the entire report.”<sup>17</sup>

The chapter was the result of a series of smart research decisions made by the Commission. The first decision that the Commission made was to not televise the hearings at any time based on their desire to have their hearings enjoy a certain level of openness in communication.<sup>18</sup> The vote to keep the press out was not unanimous, with Chairman Kerner and Senator Harris favoring limited open hearings and members Brooke, Thornton, Jenkins, Corman, McCulloch and Peden voting to keep the press completely out of the hearings.<sup>19</sup> While it was decided that the press be kept out of the Commission’s meetings and hearings the Chairman and other members made significant efforts to keep the public informed throughout their investigation.<sup>20</sup> They did this by making interim recommendations throughout their seven months of hearings as well as keeping active in correspondence with the news media. This allowed the public to stay informed and conditioned them in preparation for the assessment and recommendations the Commission would release in the *Final Report*.<sup>21</sup>

In order to produce accurate and influential recommendations, the Commission used social science research to fully understand the relationship between the media and the urban violence, as they did with most of their investigation. Therefore, Commission staff members headed the media research and made the executive decision to hire Harvard Law School Professor Abram Chayes as a consultant. Chayes’ September 18, 1967 memo to the commission

---

<sup>16</sup> Michael Lipsky and David J. Olson, *Commission Politics*, 118-119.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Hrach, “The News Media and the Disorders,” Interview with David Ginsburg, December 12, 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Hrach, “The News Media and the Disorders,” 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Lipsky and David J. Olson, *Commission Politics*, 127-128.

<sup>20</sup> Roy Reed, “Hoover Discerns No Plot in Riots,” *New York Times*, August 2, 1967.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Lipsky and David J. Olson, *Commission Politics*, 120.

would be the guide that the commission would follow throughout their research. His goals were ambitious and he demanded that the commission get a complete picture of the entirety of news media and its performance in riot and race-related reporting.<sup>22</sup> Chayes' agenda laid out seven elements that would allow the commission to succeed in accomplishing each of his goals; they included surveys, examination of media conduct, review of media misconduct, content analysis of media riot coverage, review of the previous work in media research, and lastly an open hearing for media personnel to attend to speak on behalf of their perspective.<sup>23</sup> This last element would prove to have great significance in the formation of a mutually respectful relationship between the Commission and the media; a relationship that would be necessary if the Commission wanted its recommendations and criticism of the media to be received well and put forth into reform.<sup>24</sup> Chayes also made a major decision in hiring an outside firm called Simulmatics to do some of the content analysis research for the Commission. Simulmatics had a working relationship with the Justice Department and was a reputable research firm in the late 1960s.<sup>25</sup> The research done by Simulmatics would be cited throughout the media chapter of the *Final Report*. The findings of this research would be supplemented through the insight gained at the News Media Conference held by the Commission.

The News Media Conference was on November 12, 1967. It would later be lauded as a major success and one of the best research decisions made by the Commission. Michael Lipsky and David Olsen, authors of *Commission Politics: The Processing of Racial Crisis in America*, described the conference as "somewhat rancorous" but they did argue that major themes in the

---

<sup>22</sup> Memorandum, Abram Chayes to David Ginsburg, September 18, 1967, Reel 17, 666- 698, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>23</sup> Memorandum, Abram Chayes to David Ginsburg, September 18, 1967, Reel 17, 666- 698, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Lipsky and David J. Olson, *Commission Politics*, 180.

<sup>25</sup> Philip J. Stone, Dexter C. Dunphy and Alex Bernstein, "Content Analysis Applications at Simulmatics," *American Behavioral Scientist*, May 1965, 16-18.

news media chapter of the *Final Report* reflected the discussions at the Conference.<sup>26</sup> The conference drew some of the most influential people in the media industry at the time—including the President of CBS News Richard Salent and Walter Cronkie, the anchor for *60 Minutes*.<sup>27</sup> The weekend-long conference experienced a high level of participation from major media sources but only seven of the eleven Commission members were in attendance—Kerner, Lindsay, Peden, Wilkins, Abel, Jenkins, and Thornton. This was unusual for the Commission as nearly all of the hearings enjoyed full attendance but not surprising considering all members maintained their permanent jobs throughout their time with the Commission. All four Commission members who were the most heavily involved in the chapter participated.<sup>28</sup> Chairman Kerner's opening statement immediately criticized the media for their response to the riots and race issues in general and requested that they keep an open mind about reforming their practices.<sup>29</sup> They did however, understand that this would be a sensitive issue and the media had the First Amendment as a guard against much of the Commission's criticisms. Kerner concluded the Friday meeting by saying that they were there to gather facts and not to pass judgment on media practices.<sup>30</sup>

The Conference covered a wide range of topics on Saturday, specifically on improving communication between the media and law enforcement during active disturbances and guidelines for riot coverage.<sup>31</sup> On Sunday the conference covered the relationship between the media and the black community. The discussion centered on improving the media's coverage of

---

<sup>26</sup> Michael Lipsky and David J. Olson, *Commission Politics*, 129.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Hrach, "The News Media and the Disorders," Appendix A: National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders Media Conference Attendees, xviii.

<sup>28</sup> Sol Chaneles, "News Media Coverage of the 1967 Urban Riots," February 1, 1968, Reel 15, page 10, Kerner Commission records.

<sup>29</sup> Transcript of the News Media Seminar "Combined Television and Newspapers" 1<sup>st</sup> half – November 12, 1967, Kerner Commission records, Series 12, Box 1, LBJ Library, Austin, Texas, 5.

<sup>30</sup> Draft of outline for Governor Kerner at Media Conference Dinner Meeting at Poughkeepsie, New York, Friday, November 10, 1967, Kerner Commission records, series 39, box 3, folder "Agenda," LBJ Library.

<sup>31</sup> Agenda for the Poughkeepsie Media Conference, Nov. 10-12, Kerner Commission records, series 12, box 1, folder "Commission on Civil Disorders: Complete Record of Materials at Poughkeepsie Conference, Nov. 10-12, 1967," LBJ Library.

African Americans. A main recommendation was increasing black hiring initiatives within the media.<sup>32</sup> Naturally, some of the media participants defended their criticized practices as necessary to their work. The editor of the *Milwaukee Journal*, Joe Shoquist, expressed this sentiment when he stated, “Nobody ever thinks the press does quite right.”<sup>33</sup> Although the Conference was held in a rather informal manner, it was viewed as the cornerstone of the media research. Bruce Paisner a member of the Kerner Commission research staff described it as the “most significant thing that the commission did in preparation to writing the news media chapter.”<sup>34</sup> The Conference laid the foundation for the media chapter to develop while the research that was done through Simulmatics content analysis, survey methods, and testimonies heard by the Commission provided the evidence for the Conference findings.

Simulmatics answered two key questions for the Commission. The first was regarding the media’s presentation of the riots and the second was about the reaction of the audience to this presentation and their perception of the media’s role in the disturbances.<sup>35</sup> The research firm conducted content analysis and interviews within cities that had experienced riots in the past in order to answer these questions. Their content analysis results showed that a majority of the media’s riot coverage was factual and balanced between presentation of militant black leaders and law enforcement, giving the least amount of attention to the grievances in the ghetto communities.<sup>36</sup>

However, their interview results proved that there was a racial divide in perception. African Americans perceived the media to have exaggerated the violence of the riots and failed to tell the

---

<sup>32</sup> Agenda for the Poughkeepsie Media Conference, Nov. 10-12, Kerner Commission Records, Series 12, Box 1, Folder “Commission on Civil Disorders: Complete Record of Materials at Poughkeepsie Conference, Nov. 10-12, 1967,” LBJ Library.

<sup>33</sup> Transcript of the News Media Seminar, November 11, 1967, Kerner Commission Records, Series 12, Box 1, LBJ Library.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Hrach, “The News Media and the Disorders,” Interview with Bruce Paisner, January 7, 2008.

<sup>35</sup> Chaneles, “News Media Coverage of the 1967 Urban Riots,” Reel 15, page 43, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>36</sup> Michael J. Lipsky and David J. Olsen, *Commission Politics*, 180.

true reason behind the disturbances.<sup>37</sup> A majority of those interviewed were black community residents and they were interviewed by three people, two of whom were black. Participants tended to believe that the media portrayed blacks in a more negative light by focusing on the effect of the riots, the damages inflicted on the city, rather than the causes of the riots.<sup>38</sup> Discussing the causes could have given viewers better context for the violence and allowed society to gain greater insight into the everyday grievances of the African American ghetto communities. However, the small number of interviewees who were white felt for the most part that the media's coverage of riots was comprehensive and factual, agreeing with the results of the content analysis.<sup>39</sup>

Quantitative social analysis using computers and statistics was very new at the time of the Commission's investigation, and therefore, Simulmatics' was criticized from the beginning. Initially, many commission members, like Peden, questioned the methodology behind the content analysis because the results challenged their beliefs on the media.<sup>40</sup> Alan Spivak, a staff member, argued after the publication of the *Report* that if the Commission had used only the results of the content analysis than the *Report's* media chapter would have been marginally less critical of media practices and coverage content. Commissioner Peden had doubts about the analysis and discouraged other members from relying solely on the results of the content analysis.<sup>41</sup> However, other aspects of their research produced findings more consistent with Commissioners beliefs. The interview research yielded results more similar to the opinions of the Commission members about the media, and those results tended to garner a more positive

---

<sup>37</sup> Chaneles, "News Media Coverage of the 1967 Urban Riots," Reel 15, page 43, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>38</sup> Chaneles, "News Media Coverage of the 1967 Urban Riots," Reel 15, page 46, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>39</sup> Chaneles, "News Media Coverage of the 1967 Urban Riots," Reel 15, page 46, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>40</sup> Alan Spivak to David Ginsburg, "Simulmatics Corporation," December 23, 1967, Reel 15, 103-111, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas Hrach, "The News Media and the Disorders," Interview with Alvin Spivak, November 17, 2006.

reception. The *Final Report's* chapter would include the methodology used by Simulmatics to reach their conclusions, reassuring the public that the Commission had been thorough in their investigation.<sup>42</sup> Despite the criticism the findings received this research would prove to be an important part of shaping the media chapter.

Much of the Commission's perspectives on the media were results of the testimonies they heard in conjunction with their opinions before their appointment to the Commission. Many people who testified shared their opinion on the role that media played in the violence. Various testimonies suggested different strategies for the Commission's investigation and media policy recommendations. Mayor Cavanaugh, of Detroit, argued that a workshop between law enforcement and media to establish and understanding and conduct guidelines would be essential moving forward. He felt that guidelines for media coverage in riot situations were necessary because it was in the nature of the media to exaggerate and sensationalize stories, but in the case of riots these practices could lead to the unnecessary spread of violence.<sup>43</sup>

This idea of media codes is briefly reflected in the *Final Report*, although not as a formal recommendation due to precautions taken by the Commission to not be perceived as infringing on First Amendment rights. This caution stemmed from the poor reception of the *Hutchins Commission's Report* in 1947 that attempted to criticize American newspapers. The *Hutchins Report* was largely ignored and was condemned as an attempt to limit the First Amendment.<sup>44</sup> Byron Engle, Director of the Office of Public Safety for the State Department, advocated for fundamental rules in reporting on riot control, because rumors were such an important factor in the spread of violence and rumors were easily spread by the media reports. He suggested a command and control center of cooperation and information sharing between the law

---

<sup>42</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders.*

<sup>43</sup> Transcripts, August 15, 1967, Reel 2, page 561, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Hrach, "The News Media and the Disorders," 11-12.



enforcement and the media.<sup>45</sup> Chief Lombard, of Rochester, urged the Commission to take seriously their investigation of the role that the media played in the riots. In his experience, the situation in Rochester had been completely distorted by the media, which made improvements more difficult.<sup>46</sup> He advocated for greater communication between the law enforcement and the media; which he suggested could be accomplished through the mutual understanding of each entity's responsibility. The chief responsibility of the police was to maintain order and the media's being informing the public.<sup>47</sup> Quinn Tam, the Executive Director of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) at the time, testified about the additional chaos that resulted from media presence during the disturbances, an important concern of the Commission. He found that "inflammatory coverage" could convert "a relatively harmless protest into a serious disorder."<sup>48</sup> He held the media accountable for their role in the disturbances and felt that the best way to resolve the issues would be through a sit down talk with important members of both the media and the Kerner Commission.<sup>49</sup>

The underrepresentation of African American life was a major criticism of the media. The Commission argued that the media was at fault for the absence of African American history, art, music, and literature in popular culture. The mayor of Milwaukee, Henry Maeier, urged the Commission to recommend that the media focus on "an examination of deeper social problems" concerning race and poverty. The *Final Report* advocated for a deeper understanding of African American history, culture, and perspective.<sup>50</sup> Reverend Leon Sullivan, founder of several job training programs and active leader of the Youth Council in the African American community,

---

<sup>45</sup> Transcripts, September 13, 1967, Reel 3, page 1395, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>46</sup> Transcripts, September 13, 1967, Reel 3, page 1396, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>47</sup> Transcripts, September 13, 1967, Reel 3, page 1399, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>48</sup> Transcripts, September 22, 1967, Reel 3, page 1748, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>49</sup> Transcripts, September 22, 1967, Reel 3, page 1749, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>50</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 382.

testified about his success in his “Patronage Program.” Through this program Sullivan had created nearly seven thousand jobs for African Americans in Philadelphia. Unfortunately, he received no press coverage or celebration because the media “did not focus on that type of thing.”<sup>51</sup> The conclusions found in the research, conference, and testimonies became chapter seventeen of the *Final Report*.

The drafts of the *Final Report* gave special consideration to emphasizing that their recommendations were not an attempt by the Commission to censor the press. The Commission focused on keeping their recommendations constructive with a combination of praise and criticism.<sup>52</sup> The first draft was written mostly by Chayes as he handled the results of the research and members felt he was qualified to conclude their findings.<sup>53</sup> Commission members looked over the first draft and discussed the chapter in its entirety, from word choice, recommendations, and overall analysis. The most predominant critique was illustrated in a statement by David Ginsburg, “But always changes [were made] to emphasize the need for the media to realize what had been happening. It was essential that this country understand this difficulty that the black community [faces]. There was no effort on the part of the commission to lessen the force of the chapter. And I think overall, the result was one of the best chapters in the entire report.”<sup>54</sup>

The second draft was then rewritten by Jack Rosenthal, a Commission consultant, to better reflect the minute changes the Commission felt the first draft lacked.<sup>55</sup> Changes mainly dealt with concern of members to produce a stronger criticism of the media. Katherine Peden stated that the first draft needed more work because, “The portion on the media is much too soft. We want a strong report, and here we turn our back on damaging results and effects of media in

---

<sup>51</sup> Transcripts, September 13, 1967, Reel 3, page 1193, Kerner Commission Records.

<sup>52</sup> Thomas Hrach, “The News Media and the Disorders,” Interview with Bruce Paisner, January 8, 2008.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas Hrach, “The News Media and the Disorders,” Interview with David Ginsburg, December 12, 2007.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Hrach, “The News Media and the Disorders,” Interview with David Ginsburg, December 12, 2007.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas Hrach, “The News Media and the Disorders,” Interview with David Ginsburg, December 12, 2007.

[regard] to riots,”<sup>56</sup> by which Peden meant that media played a major role in exacerbating riot situations and should be held accountable. Other criticisms focused on problematic reporting techniques and suggestions for codes of conduct that would lessen racial tension.<sup>57</sup>

After months of research, hearings, and debate the final draft of chapter fifteen of the *Final Report* was divided into four sections. The first two sections covered the media’s portrayal of the riots and then made recommendations for the improvement of riot coverage. The third and fourth focused on reporting on racial issues in general and instituting new channels of communication for race related issues in the media. The chapter summarized the methodology used in the Simulmatics research in order to demonstrate the thorough research that evidenced their findings; regardless of the fact that the content analysis did not reflect Commissioner’s beliefs, they cited their methods but chose what to emphasize in their recommendations. The report cited three overall conclusions in regard to the media’s role in the riots. First, that the media’s accounts of the riots were generally factual, as a result of the Simulmatics content analysis. Second, the portrayal of the summer violence failed to reflect accurately the causes and scale of the problem. Lastly, and what the Commission felt was the most important, the media had failed to report on the underlying problems of race relations or African American news in general.<sup>58</sup> While the Commission found the media to not be the cause of the rioting, the reporting practices that were in place during the disturbances were not constructing an accurate national opinion and understanding of the riots.<sup>59</sup> The Commission put forth a number of recommendations for improvement of media conduct in regards to race.

---

<sup>56</sup> Thomas Hrach, “The News Media and the Disorders,” 197.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Hrach, “The News Media and the Disorders,” 197.

<sup>58</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 363.

<sup>59</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 366.

The Commission found a recurrent problem to be the cooperation between law enforcement officers trying to control the situations and media officials trying to report on it. For this, the Commission recommended a series of informal seminar type workshops that would encompass all ranks of law enforcement and all levels of media employees.<sup>60</sup> A result of these workshops could range from a better understanding of the other entity to creating formal guidelines or codes of conduct that would be agreed upon by both parties. In addressing the issue of the media's failure to report on race relations and inner-city poverty the Commission recommended that more effort go into hiring African Americans throughout all levels of media jobs from editors to reporters. Efforts of increasing integration within the media would allow for a less superficial discussion of race issues centered around the violence in the United States, a concept brought to the Commission's attention as a result of their National Media Conference.<sup>61</sup> Finally, the Commission felt that an "Institute of Urban Communications" was necessary in order to ensure the implementation of these reforms in media practices.<sup>62</sup> The institute would initially be formed to carry out the recommendations of the Kerner Commission but would eventually evolve into its own being with an agenda and "life of its own."<sup>63</sup> The Commission knew their findings were "easier to state...than to solve" but with the research to support their findings, they believed they were necessary reforms if race relations were to improve.<sup>64</sup>

Upon its release, the report received a great deal of major media coverage. Shockingly, the media received the criticisms of their practices relatively well. The warm reception of the media chapter was the result of solid research and a series of well-made decisions. The first of which was the decision of President Johnson to name Otto Kerner, someone who enjoyed a mutually

---

<sup>60</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 379.

<sup>61</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 382-384.

<sup>62</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 386.

<sup>63</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 387.

<sup>64</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 386.

respectful and beneficial relationship with the media, as chairman. With Kerner as head of the Commission, the news media would be more inclined to accept the criticism and recommendations. It was also significant that other members such as Wilkins and Peden had experience in the news media profession while Mayor Lindsay had a well-developed understanding of media relations and influence. The News Media conference was another essential step in the process of the media chapter. By allowing the informal discussion setting rather than a courtroom atmosphere, the media felt more comfortable as they had the opportunity to play a direct role in their assessment. While the hearings shaped the opinions of the members in regards to media, the decision on staff member Chayes part to hire Simulmatics for sociological research and analysis gave their findings more legitimacy. It is the combination of all of these factors that allowed the news media chapter to enjoy the amount of success that it did in the public eye.

Although the Kerner Commission's recommendations regarding media were nothing that shocked the nation or that had not been discussed in some shape or form, their work "led the way" for the discussion of race relations and poverty in spheres beyond those strictly academic. In an interview Bruce Paisner, commission staff member, stated "I think we led the way. Its like a lot of things in life. Somebody else might have led the way, and there might have been other factors, and there were all those kinds of things. But I think we kind of galvanized it."<sup>65</sup> Jack Rosenthal, a commission consultant, stated that the chapter's impact centered around the way in which it brought a sense of urgency to previously discussed issues.<sup>66</sup> In the two years after the release of the report, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Gene Graham reported that tremendous

---

<sup>65</sup> Thomas Hrach, "The News Media and the Disorders," Interview with Bruce Paisner, January 7, 2008.

<sup>66</sup> Thomas Hrach, "The News Media and the Disorders," Interview with Jack Rosenthal, December 19, 2007.

progress had been made in media practices and hiring relatively quickly but reminded the public of the long road ahead to change.<sup>67</sup>

Many of the *Final Report's* recommendations never came to fruition, but the media chapter had a tangible impact on the industry, as argued by Michael Lipsky and David Olsen in their work *Commission Politics: The Processing Racial Crisis in America*:

There is little evidence that public policy toward American minorities would be much different today if the Kerner Commission had never been created. Only in two areas is the picture more positive. First, the commission's assistance in police administrators and National Guard officials in planning procedures for handling civil disorders has been widely credited with minimizing loss of life during the riots of April 1968. The commission's focus on media coverage and media employment of blacks has been similarly influential. There is a general consensus among analysts of the media that riot coverage has improved. Also, greater attention is currently paid to covering 'everyday' news of the black community, and there is greater emphasis on hiring blacks as reporters. These developments might have occurred anyway, but there is some consensus that the Kerner Commission played a significant role in hastening them.<sup>68</sup>

The Kerner Commission took careful consideration into avoiding the mistakes of their predecessors such as the Hutchins and Warren Commissions. As a result of the series of decisions made by the commission and its staff of consultants the Kerner Commission produced their recommendations in a time in American history when the sociopolitical climate was in need of reform and change when it came to race relations. The chapter was honest and succinct, which made its ideas accessible for both the public and the media industry. In the last line of the chapter the Kerner Commission requests "fair and courageous journalism: commitment and coverage that are worthy of one of the crucial domestic stories in American history."<sup>69</sup> This final calling for reform in the media embodied what the Commission felt was reasonable and necessary for the improvement of race relations in America.

---

<sup>67</sup> Graham, "The Kerner Report and the Mass Media," 93.

<sup>68</sup> Michael J. Lipsky and David J. Olsen, *Commission Politics*, 145.

<sup>69</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 389.

## Conclusion

A major concern of the commission throughout their investigation was the potential public reaction to their findings. This became especially apparent toward the end of the commission's time together as they worked to produce the *Final Report*. The commission had agreed early on that the *Report* was to be written for consumption by the general population as well as including policy recommendations for various levels of government.<sup>1</sup> In its final version the *Report* neglected to criticize major political and societal institutions as they viewed them as amendable. The commission recognized the need for reform within the institutions but the structures and practices within these major institutions were unchallenged. The reasons the commission chose to advocate for reform rather than revolutionary changes are numerous.

The *Report* did not utilize their largely progressive ideas in specific reforms for a variety of reasons. The first being that revolutionizing American institutions through their recommendations could have hurt the *Report's* reception by both the government and the public.<sup>2</sup> The commissioners also would have had an extremely difficult time coming to unanimous decisions about specific recommendations that revolutionized American society, which would have had repercussions for the publication deadline. Another important consideration was the background of many commission members that were associated or worked within the very institutions they would be criticizing. According to staff members, commissioners generally did not want to be associated with a document that condemned institutions with which they would have to return to or work with in the future.<sup>3</sup>

These concerns are in line with one major reason the commission had decided to leave American institutions relatively unharmed in their recommendations—to maximize the impact

---

<sup>1</sup> Michael Lipsky and David J. Olsen, *Commission Politics*, 130.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Lipsky and David J. Olsen, *Commission Politics*, 130.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Lipsky and David J. Olsen, *Commission Politics*, 130.

their findings would have on the executive branch.<sup>4</sup> A staff member said that the commission consistently attempted to draw focus from federal programs and redirect the focus to “the various levels of government, particularly the local level” in order to “concentrate attention of the country on problems of an underlying nature.”<sup>5</sup> This attempt to deter criticism from the federal government pushed the commission to accept Lindsay’s proposal for an introduction that advocated for attitudinal change rather than institutional change.

Amongst the deliberations and chaos as the culmination of the *Final Report* approached, the Lindsay introduction became a viable solution to provide readers with a quick introduction to commission’s most hard-hitting findings while allowing them to endorse the general recommendations all members could agree on. It is ironic that in its final days the Commission’s members, regardless of political affiliations, were unified through what would become their most controversial message—the role that white racism played in the urban violence. In addition to the perspective gained through tours, testimonies, and scientific research the commission members were prompted to accept the introduction from fellow commissioner Wilkins. In one of the final meetings, Wilkins spoke about the black experience in America.<sup>6</sup> An emotional statement from one of their peers became powerful motivation to produce in some part a strong moralistic document for American society, which became possible through the introduction. Commission members were aware of the negative ramifications that the *Report’s* use of terms such as “racist” or “racism” could have had and deliberated at length the semantics of the report.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Michael Lipsky and David J. Olsen, *Commission Politics*, 131.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Lipsky and David J. Olsen, *Commission Politics*, 132.

<sup>6</sup> Bill Barnhart and Gene Schlickman, *Kerner*, 214-215.

<sup>7</sup> Bill Barnhart and Gene Schlickman, *Kerner*, 215.



Although Lindsay is generally credited with the concepts found within the introduction, the commission had agreed on its inclusion unanimously.<sup>8</sup> While the language was strong and forced American society to consider the dismal state of race relations the introduction reflected a more conventional model for progress. The introduction focused on attitudinal change that had to come from American citizens as a whole, rather than the institutional flaws within society. This proved to be convenient for the Commission as they were exposed to major issues inherent to the African American experience throughout their investigation. In the commission's last meeting the entire *Report* was read aloud to the commission and agreed on unanimously.<sup>9</sup>

As a whole, the *Report* enjoyed many positive remarks despite the controversy and criticism that surrounded the commission's findings. Unfortunately, President Johnson refused to sign the *Report* or thank the commissioners, stating that such an act would be hypocritical on his part.<sup>10</sup> This was largely due to his growing unpopularity among Americans and the risk associated with endorsing controversial and expensive recommendations.<sup>11</sup> Regardless of its controversial reception, a majority of commission members continued to support their work and its conclusions. As evidenced by a statement given in an interview by Chairman Kerner after the *Report's* publication—"People may argue about the conclusions we reached, which is perfectly proper. They may even argue about some of the recommendations we made, which is perfectly proper. But there can be no argument about the facts which is [sic] really the foundation of the entire report."<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Bill Barnhart and Gene Schlickman, *Kerner*, 216.

<sup>9</sup> Bill Barnhart and Gene Schlickman, *Kerner*, 216.

<sup>10</sup> Bill Barnhart and Gene Schlickman, *Kerner*, 217.

<sup>11</sup> Bill Barnhart and Gene Schlickman, *Kerner*, 217.

<sup>12</sup> Transcript of Interview with Otto Kerner, undated, 5-7, Otto Kerner Papers, Box 1408, Folder "A.C.C.D. 1968," page 17, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.

The *Report's* recommendations did have influence in respect to the examination and improvement of police practices and media hiring policies before the legal implementation of affirmative action.<sup>13</sup> Although many would argue that the progress in race relations stalled relatively quickly after the release of the *Report*, many agree that the work of the commission played a significant role in what was accomplished.<sup>14</sup> The report demanded that Americans examine a part of society and analyze the existence of pervasive race and poverty issues. Thus, it remains a pivotal document in the discussion of race relations today. The *Report* took a sensitive issue that had been discussed mainly by activists and those in academia and brought it to that nation's attention in an educational outline of the issues associated with race in the United States.

The Kerner Commission may have only met for seven months and released on *Final Report* but the relevance of their investigation and findings has been lasting. The Eisenhower Foundation served in many ways as an extension of some of the work done by the Kerner Commission and even released an updated report in 2008, re-assessing race relations in the United States. Unfortunately this updated report, written in the early 2000s and titled "What Together We Can Do: A Forty Year Update of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders: Preliminary Findings," found that poor and minority communities had continued to be ignored by the mainstream press or minimized in superficial coverage.<sup>15</sup> This report reiterated many of the same concerns found in the original report.

In the wake of a series of tragedies that began in 2012, the Kerner Commission's work and its *Final Report* is more relevant than ever. On February 26, 2012 in Sanford Florida, an event occurred that would awaken a second Civil Rights Movement among young activists,

---

<sup>13</sup> Bill Barnhart and Gene Schlickman, *Kerner*, 6.

<sup>14</sup> Transcript, National Media Forum on Poverty, Inequality and Race, "Panel 1 Introduction," December 12, 2006, [www.eisenhowerfoundation.org](http://www.eisenhowerfoundation.org) (accessed February 6, 2016).

<sup>15</sup> The Eisenhower Foundation, "What Together We Can Do: A Forty Year Update of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders: Preliminary Findings," February 2008, 5.

similar to that of the 1960s, across the United States. It was the fatal shooting of an unarmed African American high school student, Trayvon Martin, by a volunteer member of the Neighborhood Watch, George Zimmerman, that sparked the national discussion of race relations. As the case began to gain national recognition, thousands of protestors nation-wide demanded for an arrest and full investigation into Martin's death.<sup>16</sup> Criticism surrounded police practices and mainstream media for failing to adequately report on the events that led to Martin's death. Racism, police practices, and media coverage were three major factors in Martin's case and in the Kerner Commissions investigation decades earlier. In the weeks after the shooting, the case garnered immense, yet sometimes misleading media coverage. Zimmerman was eventually charged with murder and his trial began in June of 2013. On July 13, 2013 a jury acquitted him, resulting in large-scale protests and the formation of several African American activist groups.<sup>17</sup>

In the wake of the Zimmerman's non-guilty verdict the Black Youth Project was born as a research initiative in the study of African American-youth and has since turned into an activist organization.<sup>18</sup> In the group's first weekend meeting they drafted their first collective statement, a letter written to "the Family of Brother Trayvon Martin and to the Black Community."<sup>19</sup> An important segment of the letter stated,

"When we heard 'not guilty' our hearts broke collectively. In that moment, it was clear that Black life had no value. Emotions poured out—emotions that are real, natural and normal, as we grieved for Trayvon and his stolen humanity. Black people, WE LOVE AND SEE YOU."<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> "From Coast to Coast, Protestors Demand Justice in Trayvon Martin Case," CNN, March 27 2012.

<sup>17</sup> "Zimmerman charged with second-degree murder," CNN, April 11, 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Mychal Denzel Smith, "How Trayvon Martin's Death Launched a New Generation of Black Activism," *The Nation*, August 27 2014, <http://www.thenation.com/article/how-trayvon-martins-death-launched-new-generation-black-activism/>.

<sup>19</sup> Mychal Denzel Smith, "How Trayvon Martin's Death Launched a New Generation of Black Activism."

<sup>20</sup> Mychal Denzel Smith, "How Trayvon Martin's Death Launched a New Generation of Black Activism."

A reading of this letter was recorded, which sparked nation-wide discussions about the devaluation of black lives in American society. This concept would further become ingrained with the creation of the Black Lives Matter Movement.

In August of 2014, an unarmed, eighteen year old African American boy, Michael Brown, was fatally shot by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. In the aftermath of his death citizens took to the streets to create a vigil and eventually protest broke out in the streets of Ferguson. The disturbances lasted six days and were characterized by violence, looting, and an aggressive militarized police presence.<sup>21</sup> Once again, the United States was forced to face its race related issues in the face of terrifying violence and loss of life. The relevance of the issues central to the riots that occurred in the 1960s has only been emphasized in light of the 2014 riots in Ferguson, Missouri. Ferguson was a more recent event in the long series of civil unrest that has plagued American history since the late 1960s. While the Kerner Commission is undoubtedly the most well known commission to be formed in response to civil unrest, a Ferguson Commission was formed to address the events that took place in 2014. The Ferguson Commission attempted to examine prior efforts—identify common themes, recommendations, policies that were implemented and their results.<sup>22</sup> In the background work for this study the Ferguson Commission briefly evaluated the most important of the Kerner Commission’s recommendations and their effects on current policy. They found that by and large the Kerner Commission’s policy recommendations had been largely unfulfilled.<sup>23</sup> They do note that their work is by no means a comprehensive assessment of the reasons that civil unrest occurs or that policymakers have been

---

<sup>21</sup> Mychal Denzel Smith, “How Trayvon Martin’s Death Launched a New Generation of Black Activism.”

<sup>22</sup> The Ferguson Commission, *Background Report: Analysis and Response to Urban Civil Disorder*, (Washington, DC: JAC Consulting, LLC, 2014), 2.

<sup>23</sup> The Ferguson Commission, *Background Report*, 2.

unable to affect far-reaching change in this area thus far. The Commissions' report does provide an insightful and modern examination of riot and response patterns.

The Black Lives Matter movement is an international activist movement that had its origins in the African American community as a response to the unjust deaths of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown. The organization focuses on eliminating violence against black people. Protests are organized around issues such as deaths of black people in killings by law enforcement officers, racial profiling, police brutality, and racial inequality within the United States criminal justice system.<sup>24</sup> The movement capitalized on the value of mass media in spreading their message by using the hashtag black lives matter on various social media platforms and gained national recognition in 2014.<sup>25</sup> The movement would gain momentum in the aftermath of tragedy in Missouri.

In late April of 2015, the United States would again be faced with a race-related summer crisis in Baltimore, Maryland. The riots that occurred in Baltimore were a result of Freddie Gray's death. Gray was a twenty-five year old African American who sustained extensive injuries to his neck and spine while in the custody of police. Gray was in a coma for the week following his arrest and died on April 19, 2015.<sup>26</sup> As Gray's death became public knowledge and the police failed to provide a detailed or consistent explanation of the events that led to his death, protests were quickly organized in his name.<sup>27</sup> In the days following Gray's funeral services several spontaneous riots erupted that included violent elements that caused Baltimore to be

---

<sup>24</sup> Shannon Luibrand, "Black Lives Matter: How the Events in Ferguson Sparked a Movement in America," *CBS*, August 2015, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/how-the-black-lives-matter-movement-changed-america-one-year-later/>.

<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Day, "#BlackLivesMatter: The Birth of a New Civil Rights Movement," *The Guardian*, July 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/19/blacklivesmatter-birth-civil-rights-movement>.

<sup>26</sup> Derek Valcourt, "Freddie Gray Dies in Hospital One Week After Arrest in Baltimore," *WJZ-TV*, April 2015, <http://baltimore.cbslocal.com/2015/04/19/freddie-gray-passes-away-after-being-injured-in-police-custody/>.

<sup>27</sup> Justin Fenton, "Hundreds at Baltimore Police Station Protest Over Man's Injuries During Arrest," *The Baltimore Sun*, April 2015, <http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/bs-md-shooting-20150418-story.html>.

declared in a state of emergency. In the end, the Baltimore riots would leave the city with twenty injured police officers, two hundred and fifty persons arrested, over three hundred businesses damaged, over two hundred fires, and over twenty stores looted.<sup>28</sup> On May 1, 2015, Gray's death was ruled a homicide and actions were taken against the six officers involved in the incident.<sup>29</sup>

The recent riots in Baltimore, Maryland brought the Kerner Commission's research and conclusions to the nation's attention once again. These episodes of unrest only reminded government officials and the public of the fear associated with the unrest of the late 1960s and 1990s. Lance Simmens, a professor of public policy at Santa Monica College, recently published an article with *The Huffington Post*, calling for the president to appoint a modern-day equivalent of the Kerner Commission.<sup>30</sup> Simmens' concerns reflect an academic expression of the greater fears that face the nation today. It is impossible to ignore how necessary reforms to American social organization and racial policy are in the United States today. Revisiting the discussions, debates, and analysis that led to the assessment of the riots, their causes, and policy recommendations put forth by the Kerner Commission would be valuable to current government officials and policymakers. Revisiting the Kerner Commission's investigation through a modern lens could lead to the sweeping changes the Commission failed to produce the first time.

---

<sup>28</sup> "Baltimore Riots Live Updates: About 200 Arrested After Violence, Fires Sweep City," *Los Angeles Times*, April 2015, <http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-nn-baltimore-freddie-gray-20150427-htmstory.html>.

<sup>29</sup> Alan Blinder and Richard Perez-Pena, "6 Baltimore Officers Charged in Freddie Gray Death," *New York Times*, May 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/02/us/freddie-gray-autopsy-report-given-to-baltimore-prosecutors.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/02/us/freddie-gray-autopsy-report-given-to-baltimore-prosecutors.html?_r=0).

<sup>30</sup> Lance Simmens, "We Need Another Kerner Commission Now," *Huffington Post* (2015), [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lance-simmens/we-need-another-kerner-co\\_b\\_7206850.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lance-simmens/we-need-another-kerner-co_b_7206850.html).

## Bibliography:

- “Albert Reiss Jr.; Coined ‘Proactive’ During Police Experiment.” *The Washington Post*. Obituaries. 2006. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/05/04/AR2006050402114.html>.
- “Baltimore Riots Live Updates: About 200 Arrested After Violence, Fires Sweep City.” *Los Angeles Times*. April 2015. <http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-nn-baltimore-freddie-gray-20150427-htmlstory.html>.
- Banfield, Edward. *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Future of Our Urban Crisis*. Boston: Little Brown, 1970.
- Barnhart, Bill, and Eugene F. Schlickman. *Kerner: The Conflict of Intangible Rights*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999.
- Blinder, Alan and Richard Perez-Pena. “6 Baltimore Officers Charged in Freddie Gray Death.” *New York Times*. May 2015. [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/02/us/freddie-gray-autopsy-report-given-to-baltimore-prosecutors.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/02/us/freddie-gray-autopsy-report-given-to-baltimore-prosecutors.html?_r=0).
- Button, James W. *Black Violence: Political Impact of the 1960s Riots*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978.
- Califano, Joseph A. Jr. *The Triumph and Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991.
- Cannato, Vincent. *The Ungovernable City: John Lindsay and His Struggles to Save New York*. New York: Basic Books, 2001.
- Chapman, William. “Racism, Poverty Blamed for Riots.” *Washington Post*. March 1, 1968.
- Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration 1963-1969 Part V: Records of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (Kerner Commission). Steven F. Lawson, ed. Microfilm. Frederick, University Publications of America, Inc., 1967. Hereafter referred to as: Kerner Commission Records.
- Conot, Robert. *Rivers of Blood, Years of Darkness*. New York: Bantam Books, 1967.
- Cutler, John. *Biography of a Senator: Ed Brooke*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972.
- Day, Elizabeth. “#BlackLivesMatter: The Birth of a New Civil Rights Movement.” *The Guardian*. July 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/19/blacklivesmatter-birth-civil-rights-movement>.

Feighery, Glen. "Conscience of the Calling: How Journalists used Three National Commissions to Blend a New Professional Ethic, 1963-1975." University of North Carolina. 2004.

Fenton, Justin. "Hundreds at Baltimore Police Station Protest Over Man's Injuries During Arrest." *The Baltimore Sun*. April 2015.  
<http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/bs-md-shooting-20150418-story.html>.

Fogelson, Robert. "Violence as Protest." *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science*. 29 (1), 1968.

"From Coast to Coast, Protestors Demand Justice in Trayvon Martin Case." CNN. March 27 2012.

Gilbert, Ben. "Press, TV Coverage Faulted." *Washington Post*. March 1, 1968.

Gilje, Paul. *Rioting in America*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996.

Graham, "The Kerner Report and the Mass Media," 93.

Highsmith, Andrew. "Demolition Means Progress: Race, Class and Destruction of American Dream in Flint, Michigan." University of Michigan, 2009.

Hrach, Thomas. "The News Media and the Disorders: The Kerner Commission's Examination of Race Riots and Civil Disturbances, 1967-68." Ohio University. June 2008.

"Katherine Peden 80; Broadcaster Served on Panel Studying Riots." *Los Angeles Times*. January 12, 2006.

"Kerner of Illinois." *Christian Science Monitor*. August 8, 1962.

Klein, Woody. "Crisis in America: The News Media Respond to the New Challenge." *Quill*. January 1969.

Knopf, Terry Ann. *Rumors, Race and Riots*. New Brunswick: Transaction Books. 1975.

Lawson, Steven, ed. *Microfilm Guide to the Records of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*.

"Lindsay Victory Puts Him in FORE; He is Seen as G.O.P. Hope in Election to Congress from 17<sup>th</sup> District, *New York Times*, 1958, 31.

Lipsky, Michael and David J. Olsen. *Commission Politics: The Processing of Racial Crisis in America*. New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1977.



- Luibrand, Shannon. "Black Lives Matter: How the Events in Ferguson Sparked a Movement in America." *CBS*. August 2015. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/how-the-black-lives-matter-movement-changed-america-one-year-later/>.
- Maynard, Robert C. "Cities Warned on Using Heavy Arms." *Washington Post*. March 1, 1968.
- Marx, Gary. "Two Cheers for the National Riot (Kerner) Commission Report." In J.F. Szwed, *Black Americans: A Second Look*. Basic Books, 1970. Stable URL: <http://web.mit.edu/gtmarx/www/kerner.html>.
- McLaughlin, Malcolm. *The Long Hot Summer of 1967: Urban Rebellion in America*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
- "Our Nation is Moving Toward Two Societies – One Black, One White." *Washington Post*. March 1, 1968.
- Pearson, Richard. "Longtime Steelworkers Chief I.W. Abel Dies at Age of 78." *Washington Post*. August 11, 1987.
- "Piri Thomas' Life and Flows..." <http://www.cheverote.com/bio.html>.
- Raz, Mical. *What's Wrong With The Poor?* The University of North Carolina Press, 2013.
- Reed, Roy. "Hoover Discerns No Plot in Riots." *New York Times*. August 2, 1967.
- Remarks in Chicago Before the National Association of Broadcasters. April 1, 1968. Public Papers of the Presidents, Lyndon Johnson. [www.presidency.ucsb.edu/lyndon\\_johnson](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/lyndon_johnson), (accessed February 8, 2016).
- Remarks Upon Signing the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967. November 7, 1967. Public Papers of the Presidents, Lyndon Johnson. [www.presidency.ucsb.edu/lyndon\\_johnson](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/lyndon_johnson), (accessed February 9, 2016).
- Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities. "Kenneth Bancroft Clark". *Robert Penn Warren's Who Speaks for the Negro? Archive*, Stable URL: <http://whospeaks.library.vanderbilt.edu/interview/kenneth-bancroft-clark>.
- Rossi, Peter. *Ghetto Revolts*. Chicago: Aldine Pub. Company, 1970.
- Schlickman, Gene. *Kerner: The Conflict of Intangible Rights by Bill Barnhart*. Indiana Magazine of History. Vol. 96 (4). Indiana University Department of History, 2000. <http://www.jstor.org/mercury.concordia.ca/stable/27792286>.
- "Senator Harris: Key Figure in the Study of Riots." *The Washington Star*. March 10, 1968.

- Severo, Richard. "Kenneth Clark, Who Fought Segregation, Dies." *The New York Times*. May 2, 2005.
- Simmens, Lance. "We Need Another Kerner Commission Now." *Huffington Post* (2015). [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lance-simmens/we-need-another-kerne-co\\_b\\_7206850.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lance-simmens/we-need-another-kerne-co_b_7206850.html).
- Smith, Mychal Denzel. "How Trayvon Martin's Death Launched a New Generation of Black Activism." *The Nation*. August 27 2014. <http://www.thenation.com/article/how-trayvon-martins-death-launched-new-generation-black-activism/>.
- Stone, Philip and Dexter C. Dunphy and Alex Bernstein. "Content Analysis Applications at Simulmatics." *American Behavioral Scientist*. May 1965.
- The Eisenhower Foundation. "What Together We Can Do: A Forty Year Update of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders: Preliminary Findings." February 2008.
- The Ferguson Commission. *Background Report: Analysis and Response to Urban Civil Disorder*. Washington, DC: JAC Consulting, LLC, 2014.
- "The Most Intimate Medium." *Time*. October 14, 1966.
- The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*. New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1968.
- Thomas, Bruce. "The Kerner Commission: Remembering, Forgetting and Truth-Telling." *Poverty and Race*. Vol. 17 (4). July/August 2008.
- Times Staff and Wire Reports. "Katherine Peden, 80; Broadcaster Served on Panel Studying Riots." *Los Angeles Times*. January 12, 2006. <http://articles.latimes.com/2006/jan/12/local/me-passings12.1>
- Transcript of Interview with Otto Kerner, undated. Otto Kerner Papers. Box 1408. Folder "A.C.C.D. 1968." Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.
- Valcourt, Derek. "Freddie Gray Dies in Hospital One Week After Arrest in Baltimore" *WJZ-TV*. April 2015. <http://baltimore.cbslocal.com/2015/04/19/freddie-gray-passes-away-after-being-injured-in-police-custody/>.
- White, Jean. "Chief Blame for Riots Put on White Racism." *Washington Post*. March 1, 1968.
- White, William. "Reassuring Note . . . First Actions By Panel Hailed." *Washington Post*. August 14, 1967.
- "Zimmerman charged with second-degree murder." CNN. April 11, 2012.