

JULY 29, 1967 - 11:30 a.m.

NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMISSION ON CIVIL  
DISORDERS

Gov. Kerner  
Mayor Lindsay  
Sen. Harris  
Sen. Brooke  
Rep. James Corman  
Rep. William McCulloch  
I. W. Abel  
Charles Thornton

Roy Wilkins  
Katherine Peden  
Herbert Jenkins  
Joe Califano  
Harry McPherson  
Ramsey Clark  
Geo. Christian  
Charles Schultze

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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July 29, 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: <sup>Tom</sup> Tom Johnson

Attached are the notes from the President's Meeting with the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, July 29, 1967 in the Cabinet Room.

Those attending:

The President

Governor Kerner

Mayor Lindsay

Senator Fred Harris

Senator Edward Brooke

Congressman James Corman

Congressman William McCulloch

I. W. Abel

Charles Thornton

Roy Wilkins

Katherine G. Peden

Herbert Jenkins

Joe Califano

Harry McPherson

Ramsey Clark

George Christian

Charles Schultze

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The President's Meeting with the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, July 29, 1967

The President expressed his appreciation to all of the members for their accepting his request that they serve on this Commission. The President then reviewed his statement with the members. That statement follows:

"This morning I have welcomed the members of the Commission on Civil Disorders to the White House for its first meeting. The Commission is chaired by Governor Kerner of Illinois. The Vice Chairman is Mayor Lindsay of New York. They are both here with me.

I have commended these 11 citizens for what they have agreed to do for this nation. They are undertaking a responsibility as great as any in our society.

The civil peace has been shattered in a number of cities. The American people are deeply disturbed. They are baffled and dismayed by the wholesale looting and violence that has occurred both in small towns and great metropolitan centers.

No society can tolerate massive violence, anymore than a body can tolerate massive disease. And we in America shall not tolerate it.

But just saying that does not solve the problem. We need to know the answers, I think, to three basic questions about these riots:

- What happened?
- Why did it happen?
- What can be done to prevent it from happening again and again?

Beyond these basic questions there are others -- the answers to which can help our Governors and our mayors, our chiefs of police and our citizens all over the country to cope with their immediate and their long-range problems of maintaining order:

- Why riots occur in some cities and do not occur in others?

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-- Why one man breaks the law, while another, living in the same circumstances, does not?

-- To what extent, if any, there has been planning and organization in any of the riots?

-- Why have some riots been contained before they got out of hand and others have not?

-- How well equipped and trained are the local and State police, and the State guard units, to handle riots?

-- How do police-community relationships affect the likelihood of a riot -- or the ability to keep one from spreading once it has started?

-- Who took part in the riots? What about their age, their level of education, their job history, their origins, and their roots in the community?

-- Who suffered most at the hands of the rioters?

-- What can be done to help innocent people and vital institutions escape serious injury?

-- How can groups of lawful citizens be encouraged, groups that can help to cool the situation?

-- What is the relative impact of the depressed conditions in the ghetto -- joblessness, family instability, poor education, lack of motivation, poor health care -- in stimulating people to riot?

-- What Federal, State and local programs have been most helpful in relieving those depressed conditions?

-- What is the proper public role in helping cities repair the damage that has been done?

-- What effect do the mass media have on the riots?

What we are really asking for is a profile of the riots -- of the rioters, of their environment, of their victims, of their causes and effects.

We are asking for advice on

-- short-term measures that can prevent riots.

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-- better measures to contain riots once they begin,

-- and long-term measures that will make them only a sordid page in our history.

I know this is a tall order.

One thing should be absolutely clear: this matter is far, far too important for politics. It goes to the health and safety of all American citizens -- Republicans and Democrats. It goes to the proper responsibilities of officials in both of our Parties. It goes to the heart of our society in a time of swift change and of great stress. I think the composition of this Commission is proof against any narrowness or partisanship.

You will have all the support and cooperation you need from the Federal Government, as the Chairman and the Vice Chairman lead this Commission in this study.

Sometimes various Administrations have set up commissions that were expected to put the stamp of approval on what the Administration believed.

This is not such a commission. We are looking to you, not to approve our own notions, but to guide us and to guide the country through a thicket of tension, conflicting evidence and extreme opinion.

So, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Vice Chairman, let your search be free. Let it be untrammelled by what has been called the "conventional wisdom." As best you can, find the truth, the whole truth, and express it in your report.

I hope you will be inspired by a sense of urgency, but also conscious of the danger that lies always in hasty conclusions.

The work that you do ought to help guide us not just this summer,, but for many summers to come and for many years to come."

The President said, "I want you to find the truth and express it in your report. I looked over a nation of 200 million people and selected only 11."

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The President then introduced Secretary Vance to the group.

Secretary Vance made the following report:

1. Detroit is now close to normal.
2. There were only a few incidents last night.
3. Traffic has returned to normal.
4. Most of the people are back at work.
5. Street lights are on in almost all sections.

Secretary Vance said that darkness creates fear. He said he had seen policemen shooting at shadows which did not exist.

6. The streets are now being cleaned up.
7. There is a firm resolve in the community that the city will be rebuilt.
8. Secretary Vance authorized steps toward a phase out of the troops beginning yesterday.
9. The troops will be removed and placed in reserve locations on Sunday. Both Governor Romney and Mayor Cavanagh have been advised.
10. In summary, Detroit is almost back to normal.

The President pointed out that there will be a number of various Congressional committees which will be investigating the riots in the coming weeks. He said these will be made up of good public servants.

The President said he selected Governor Kerner because the Governors are so deeply involved in this area. The President pointed out that Governor Kerner has an outstanding record both as a state administrator and as the chairman of Governor's groups. The President said that mayors and chiefs of police throughout the nation will also be very significantly involved. For that reason Mayor Lindsay and Atlanta Police Chief Jenkins were selected. The President said he considered

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them the best of all the ones he reviewed. The President said that Mr. Thornton is a major industrialist, and Mr. I.W. Abel will represent well the labor movement. The President said he selected Roy Wilkins for his understanding and enlightened approach. Mrs. Peden was selected because she is an outstanding woman who has experience as a leader of the business and professional business organizations and in the field of radio and television.

From the Congress the President said he selected two outstanding members of the Judiciary Committee, Congressman McCulloch and Congressman Corman. From the Senate he selected Senator Brooke and Senator Harris because of their unique qualifications in the field.

The President then read a list of cases in which the President has been called upon to supply Federal troops by the Governors. The President pointed out that it is necessary for three conditions to exist:

1. For the legislature or the Governor to make the request.
2. For a state of insurrection to be declared.
3. For it to be clearly established that local and State law enforcement officials cannot deal with the situation.

If those conditions are met, then the President must issue a proclamation and sign an executive order.

After the photographers and reporters left the Cabinet Room, the President urged members of the Commission, especially the Congressional members, to give the business of the Commission top priority. He said all too often Commissions are appointed, pictures taken, and then the members never go to any more meetings. President then called on Governor Otto Kerner, Chairman of the Commission.

Kerner said he did not want to let the business of the Commission to be delayed. He asked if the Commission could meet following lunch to begin work. The President agreed to this and to giving all the administrative help requested by Governor Kerner such as offices, staff, etc. Kerner said the first order of business was to hire staff. He said he wanted today to work up an agenda. He said the people across the country are very anxious and disturbed. The people expect the impossible from this Commission and "we will not be able to deliver all," Kerner said.

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"But we should prepare an agenda and go slowly but surely," Kerner said. Kerner also said this afternoon's meeting would discuss other matters such as what powers the Commission should have such as subpoena powers.

The President then called on Mayor John Lindsay of New York, Vice Chairman of the Commission.

Lindsay agreed with Kerner that the Commission faced an impossible job. Lindsay said there is "no room for partisanship and the President is entitled to all the support." Lindsay suggested the staff of the Commission should include urbanists.

Mayor Lindsay said that there is going to be a problem getting the right type staff. He said we must tap the resources of this country to find the very best to serve.

We need thoroughly modern men. Beyond that the role will be a difficult one.

We must fix our priorities. Should we seek short term solutions or should we examine the virus <sup>AND</sup> the decay which exists in our cities. We face immediate problems as to what tactics we employ including the use of the FBI and the National Guard.

The President said that we may have problems in as many as 80 cities. We need new training for riot control procedures which are already underway. We want the National Guard to be appropriately trained. "None of you will ever know how it feels to send Federal troops into the cities until you yourself send them in."

The President said, "It makes chill bumps to think of the possibility of the National Guard shooting citizens and citizens shooting back at them. I think it is a tribute to General Throckmorton that no soldier has been shot. No citizen has been killed as a result of the regular forces which are in Detroit.

Secretary Vance said that it is imperative that the National Guards be retrained for riot control. Confidentially, Secretary Vance said that the regular troops were much better trained than the National Guard in Detroit.

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He said the Regulars are professionals. They are disciplined. They know how to do their job. Rapport quickly sprung up between the National Guard in Detroit and the Regular forces. The National Guard simply did not have the training and the know-how which was important. The Secretary said he noticed a change in the National Guard troops. He said now the Detroit National Guard units looked like soldiers because of the training they have received under General Throckmorton's leadership.

The President said he thought this pointed to a problem with the entire Defense establishment and for the need to reappraise the training of the Guard units. Governor Kerner then addressed the group and pointed out that there was a big job to be done and that getting the very best equipment was important for the National Guard as he had found last fall in Illinois.

Senator Brooke said we need all the deterrent factors we can get. The Senator questioned whether we are getting to the mayors all of the benefit of what we have learned in Detroit. He said the very appointment of the President's Advisory Commission has deterrent factors. He said the help of news media will be of great assistance. He continued "We cannot do very much overnight. The information we already have gained from Detroit and the experience there should be disseminated without delay to the Mayors and others throughout the country. We must work on preventive measures. We must isolate sections of the city from the lawbreakers when that need arises."

Mayor Lindsay said that the U. S. Conference of Mayors and other groups would be addressing themselves to these problems in coming days. He said that he would be meeting with a group in Washington tomorrow on this very issue. The President said he was aware of this, and was considering addressing the group by closed circuit television. The President said it was important that there not be any room for criticism or room for division on this issue. The President said that the person who drafted his television address to the nation was a man who has no political background and a man who thoroughly understands constitutional law.

The President said he is sending today a letter to the mayors which said that lawlessness must not be permitted and the local leadership should be stressed.

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Dear Mr. Mayor:

Riots and disorder have brought violence and agony to the streets of America and to the hearts of its people.

For all our citizens, but particularly for those in public responsibility, this National tragedy poses grave obligations.

- Above all, lawless disorder must be halted quickly and effectively, whenever and wherever it occurs. Local initiative and local action must form the first thrust of this effort. But when local resources are inadequate to the challenge, Federal power will back up local forces to the limit the law permits.
- We must work and pray for harmony between the races, and prevent the destructive acts of a criminal few from prejudicing the great law-abiding majority of Negro citizens, who deplore the havoc and suffer its torment the most.
- All levels and branches of Government must now press, with new resolve, the Nation's peaceful attack on the conditions which breed despair and violence.

My convictions on this urgent problem are set forth in my address to the Nation on July 27, 1967. I am enclosing a copy of that address, with the firm belief that working together in partnership and understanding we can see America safely through this troubled day -- to the better days that wait ahead.

Sincerely,

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Governor Kerner said that we need to study more about what happened in Detroit. He said that he had seen in his local city that the quick call out of local forces and a "show of force" very effectively dealt with outbreaks.

Ramsey Clark then reviewed a chronology of Monday when the troop deployment in Detroit was being considered.

The President then asked for questions. The group recessed and then regrouped for lunch in the Mansion.

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