

# Report for Action

**GOVERNOR'S SELECT COMMISSION ON CIVIL DISORDER  
STATE OF NEW JERSEY**

**February, 1968**

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# Preface

On Aug. 8, 1967, Gov. Richard J. Hughes asked this Commission to "examine the causes, the incidents and the remedies for the civil disorders which have afflicted New Jersey." The Governor said:

"What I am seeking, and what the people of New Jersey expect, is not a meaningless and detailed repetition of studies, but a realistic analysis of the disorders . . . and practical proposals which, hopefully, will prevent their recurrence in our State."

This report is the product of the Commission's five-month effort to fulfill this assignment. In accordance with the Governor's instruction, we have not engaged in studies for studies' sake; nor have we attempted to devise detailed plans and programs for all the political, social and economic problems that beset our State and many of its communities. Instead, we have used the limited time available to us to concentrate our investigation on the problems that we found to be of most immediate concern to the people in the troubled communities, to local authorities and to knowledgeable organizations and individuals.

Many of the problems we looked into are national in origin and scope. They can be solved only in the context of imaginative new national policies and vastly increased Federal aid to states and local communities. Yet, again in the spirit of practicality that motivated us, we focused our attention on what the people and governments of our State and our communities can do, and do now, to tackle the issues.

In an effort to make the most effective use of our resources, we devoted special attention to the problems of Newark, for it is there that the most serious disorders occurred and it is there that the problems are most complex. We believe that the experience of Newark yields many lessons for other large cities in our State that are grappling with similar problems. Many of our recommendations address themselves to the State Government. Other recommendations, though specifically designed for Newark, might profitably be studied by other cities and communities.

Our work included field trips to all the areas where disorders occurred last summer. We had 65 meetings, heard 106 witnesses, developed a transcript of 5,000 pages, an extensive file of exhibits and held more than 700 staff interviews. All witnesses before the Commission were sworn.

The first part of this report deals with the problems that cause tension, frustration and bitterness in many of our cities.

The second part describes and analyzes the disorders that broke out against this background.

The third and final part lists our recommendations.

Some subjects, such as the controversy over the coming of the New Jersey College of Medicine and Dentistry to Newark, will recur in several parts. Others, such as the problems posed by municipal boundaries, will be discussed from different aspects in different chapters. Whenever possible, we have attempted to avoid repetitiousness. In some cases, however, we were willing to take this risk in the interest of providing all relevant materials in a given context and of a thematically logical listing of our recommendations.

We could not have done our job without the cooperation of many State and local agencies and of experts in many fields of urban affairs, both in and outside our State. The candor and the wisdom of hundreds of people in the Negro and Spanish-speaking communities with whom we talked have been most valuable and helpful.

Last but not least, a word of appreciation to the staff for a superb performance. It was a small group of dedicated people who worked day and night to produce the information on which this Commission could base reasoned judgments.

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## Introduction

That this report had to be written is a manifestation of a deep failing in our society, for many of the problems that it analyzes should have been solved by now. Had we, as a society, made a more timely and determined effort to solve them, the events that led to the establishment of this Commission might never have occurred.

Nor can we plead ignorance about the nature of these problems. The shelves of government offices and academic institutions are filled with studies that shed light on them and offer avenues for solutions. The question is whether we have the will to act.

The record of history does not augur well for action. Although violence has marked the path of many ethnic and social groups, the major issues that were in contention in those conflicts have long since been resolved. But one great issue remains unresolved: the place of the Negro in American society. It is this issue that almost tore the nation apart one hundred years ago. It is this question that led to the Chicago riot of 1919, the Harlem riots of 1935 and 1943 and the mounting disorders in our cities in the years since World War II.

In the wake of the major racial conflicts of this century, commissions like this were established. They investigated the disorders and their causes and made recommendations. Many chapters in these earlier volumes read much like some in this report. Poor housing, unemployment and inferior education of Negroes figure prominently in the report on the 1919 Chicago riot, just as they do in our analysis of the conditions in Newark in 1967.

The mood in our cities clearly indicates that commissions like ours will have outlived their usefulness unless action is forthcoming from their recommendations. Our disadvantaged communities must see far more tangible evidence of a commitment to change than has emerged so far, or the summer of 1967 is likely to become a prologue to tragedy, and the time for study and planning will have run out.

A sixteen-year-old high school student from Plainfield told this Commission:

"There was a time the white person was accepted in the Negro community and he could just about go into the Negro community and feel comfortable. The Negro couldn't go in his community and feel comfortable, but that was okay. But now neither one feels comfortable in either community, and this is how they have drawn further apart."

It was a convincingly understated way of telling us that the distance between white and black is growing, and that distrust and anger are on the rise on both sides.

There is a clear and present danger to the very existence of our cities. Consequently, more is demanded than argument over the respective shortcomings, responsibilities and prejudices of white and black. The way to use time now is for action.

The burden of responsibility weighs most heavily on those in positions of leadership, power and with control over the resources that will be needed to produce tangible results. But much of what needs to be done and much of what this commission is recommending does not cost money and cannot be bought.

The central issue with which this nation has temporized for the past one hundred years—to make equality real for the black man—was bound sooner or later to land on the doorstep of each of us. And had not the Negro been patient and forbearing, it would have landed there before.

The fate of a city today is in the hands of the policeman on the beat, the landlord of a tenement building, the shop steward in the factory, the employer, the storekeeper, the social worker, the public employee behind his desk or the neighbor who will not be a neighbor.

We need fewer promises and more action from political leaders and government officials.

We need fewer press releases from police commissioners on community relations and more respect by patrolmen for the dignity of each citizen.

We need fewer speeches from employers and union leaders on equal opportunity in the future, and more flexible hiring standards now.

We need more principals, teachers and guidance counselors who want their students to succeed instead of expecting them to fail.

We need more social workers who respect and foster a client's pride instead of treating him as an irritant or a child.

Suburban residents must understand that the future of their communities is inextricably linked to the fate of the city, instead of harboring the illusion that they can maintain invisible walls or continue to run away.

Such change is possible only when the people in our more fortunate communities understand that what is required of them is not an act of generosity toward the people in the ghettos, but a decision of direct and deep self-interest.

To bring about such change and the re-evaluation and revision of individual conduct and practice requires a climate that must be created by extraordinary leadership on all levels of government and in the private sector.

It requires clean, imaginative and sensitive administration in our city halls, where the end of business as usual is long overdue.

It requires broad opportunity for the Negro communities to convert into a force for prideful achievement the power that despair caused them to use for destruction.

It requires the realization of the simple truth that people are a community's most valuable resource, and that to help people gain access to opportunity represents an investment likely to yield a better return than all the subsidies we now provide for scores of economic sectors in our country, from farms to petroleum, from railroads to publications.

If the events of last July had one effect, it was to show that we can no longer escape the issue. The question is whether we shall resort to illusion, or finally come to grips with reality.

The illusion is that force alone will solve the problem. But our society cannot deliver on its promises when terror stalks the streets, and disorder and lawlessness tear our communities apart. No group of people can better themselves by rioting and breaking laws that are enacted for the benefit and protection of everyone. Riots must be condemned. The cardinal principle of any civilized society is law and order. It is vital to all. Without it no one will succeed or endure. The primary responsibility of government toward a threatened riot or mass violence is prompt and firm action, judiciously applied and sufficient to restore peace and order.

At the same time, we recognize that in the long run law and order can prevail only in conditions of social justice. Law enforcement in our country is neither designed nor equipped to deal with massive unrest. Our police establishments should not be forced into the role of armies of occupation. Therefore, reality demands prompt action to solve the long-neglected problems of our cities.

Inherent in these problems is the virus of segregation. It cannot be treated with palliatives. It must be attacked at the source. It is rampant in urban bodies no longer healthy enough to fight disease of any kind and which will increasingly suffer frustration and disorder unless old and outdated approaches are abandoned and new solutions sought in the metropolitan and regional context.

Such solutions require a co-ordinated attack on many fronts, and they will take time. But a beginning can be made quickly. The way to begin is at home, in the way we do business on our streets, in our shops, our schools, our courts, government offices and wherever members of the black and white communities meet.

The central issue was stated most simply and starkly by a 54-year-old Negro businessman who testified before this Commission:

"Just treat a Negro like a man. It is so easy, but the white man will not stand for a black man being a man. He's got to be a boy."<sup>2</sup>