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ON THE POLITICS OF RIOT COMMISSIONS

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INTRODUCTION

In his testimony before the National Commission on Civil Disorders, Kenneth Clark questioned the utility of commission activity when he reminded his audience that reading riot commission reports of the past was like "...Alice in Wonderland--with the same moving picture re-shown over and over again, the same analysis, the same recommendations, and the same inaction."¹ In this paper we will explore selected dimensions of the politics of riot commissions to provide insight into the capacity of riot commissions to affect the political process. We will examine the extent to which riot commissions, as organizations, are inherently capable of performing as they are charged: conducting investigations and providing recommendations for solving social problems. We will also examine the extent to which it is realistic to expect riot commission recommendations to be implemented.²

According to the President's Executive Order and his remarks to the Commission upon its establishment, and according to Governor Hughes' remarks to the New Jersey Commission upon its formation, recent riot commissions have been called upon to perform their tasks observing the following guidelines. The commissions should be thorough and comprehensive. They should treat and explore "basic" as well as immediate causes. They should report within a limited time period. They should seek answers without regard to partisanship or the interests of the executive branch. To accomplish these objectives, commissions are promised, both publicly and in private consultation, the full cooperation of other government agencies, and whatever resources are necessary to complete the task. They are advised, and commissioners think, that their findings and recommendations will provide the basis for executive and other authoritative action ("guide us and...guide the country.")³ These guidelines give rise to public expectations which cannot be fulfilled, and provide commissions with incompatible goals which cannot meaningfully be reconciled.

These summary generalizations emerge from a study of the political process of riot commissions extending from recruitment of members and staffs to implementation of recommendations. Our research, of which this exploratory analysis is but a preliminary report, is focused primarily on the National Commission on Civil Disorders and on the Governor's Select Commission on Civil Disorder of the State of New Jersey. We are also investigating commission politics in three cities--Detroit, Newark, and Milwaukee--on the assumption that the study of riot commissions must involve discovering and articulating patterns of implementation of recommendations.⁴

Our discussion is divided into two parts. In Part I we discuss the internal organizational life of recent riot commissions, dividing the exposition into sections on 1) introductory perspectives; 2) the scarcity of time and resources; 3) tensions between establishing political legitimacy and scientific orientations; and 4) considerations

of commission integration. In Part II we discuss strategies riot commissions may adopt to overcome their relatively powerless status. We will concentrate attention on attempts to 1) maximize the visibility of reports; 2) monopolize legitimate interpretations of civil disorders; 3) reassure otherwise aroused political groups; and 4) adopt perspectives that anticipate the needs of other actors in the political process. We will also discuss briefly some tentative perspectives relating to the factors affecting likelihood of recommendation implementation.

Internal Riot Commission Politics

1. Introductory Perspectives

It is important for riot commissions to be considered free of bias and particularistic interests. The temporary quality of commissions is advantageous because of the recognition that commissions will soon be divested of identity. However, commission members retain the affiliations and group and ideological predispositions which they possess because of position, occupational or social role, and/or background. While commissions as commissions are overwhelmingly oriented toward the single task of producing a report, commissioners may be oriented toward many goals. These goals may include performing as responsible citizens, protecting interests toward which they are sympathetic, minimizing personal costs, and advocating certain ideological or strategic approaches to policy problems.⁵

A critical problem which emerges from the multiplicity of commissioner orientations is the tension between producing the document and supporting the final product (which we will call report orientations), and other orientations of commissioners (which we will call career orientations). This tension is built into commission life, and cannot be ignored by staff personnel. It is exacerbated by the fact that members are chosen for commission duties on the basis of their status, political responsibility and reliability, and the extent to which they are "representative" of some important interest. Thus commissioners are expected to develop report orientations at the same time as they are chosen because of their "representation" of diverse interests.

The need to develop integration mechanisms, a functional requisite of complex organizations,⁶ is relatively more pronounced in the case of riot commissions. The temporary nature of commissions may inhibit development of group norms and orientations because of the anticipated discontinuance of the organization. And recruitment of commissioners (and some staff members) representative of divergent interests builds into commission organizational life an additional centrifugal feature. Differences in the social and career bases of staff members vis a vis commissioners provides still additional fragmentation tendencies.⁷

Another critical commission problem is the tension between the scientific legitimacy of a report, and its political legitimacy. The scientific legitimacy of a report will be judged on criteria for data gathering, elaboration and testing of hypotheses, and quality of inference. The political legitimacy of a report will be judged on the status of members and the groups they represent, demonstrations of commitment and cohesion, the nature of public reception, and the quality of the investigation. If objective and sophisticated social

science is of highest priority, the politicians and political individuals who are appointed to commissions are ill-equipped to provide this. What they are pre-eminently qualified to do is lend their names to, and support, a single document. Such a document derives its impact, not from the nature or style of the inquiry, but primarily from the fact that a small group of prominent men, directly or indirectly accountable to sizeable constituencies and varying to some degree in outlook and public philosophy, are willing to subscribe to a given set of findings and recommendations. Such a document clearly would have political legitimacy independent of the nature of the inquiry.

There is interaction between the scientific and the political, of course. The political search must be conducted in an honest and objective way, or it is easily discredited. The scientific search must be adequately conducted or staff work will be rejected by commissioners. The strategy of the Executive Director, his immediate assistant(s) and the commission Chairman, must be to minimize tensions and difficulties which may arise from pursuing two modes of investigation.

These perspectives emerge from inspecting some of the contradictory functions which riot commissions are asked to perform and are confirmed as salient by interviews with staff and commission members, who testify to the significance of these problems, and whose jobs on recent commissions to a significant degree revolved around diminishing their disruptive impact.

2. Scarcity of Time and Resources.

In attempting to achieve their stated goals, riot commissions operate under organizational constraints of inadequate time and scarce resources. With a deadline looming virtually as soon as commission life begins, commission directors must constantly tailor commission activity to the necessity of boiling staff work down to a final document to which members can consent. Thus they are forced to initiate staff activity in a less rational and orderly fashion than they would prefer, and to begin projects and hire consultants and staff personnel with only a vague idea of what they should do. Furthermore, resources pledged in the heat of crisis may not be forthcoming. Once the staff effort is mounted, directors are, at some point, forced by time pressures to call a halt to the search and investigative aspects of commission work and desperately focus on a single task-- completing the report. Ends are left untied, corners cut, in the hectic process of writing and rewriting draft sections of the reports. 8

Pressures of time are incompatible with the goals of complete and thorough search for answers to questions of causation. Excluding time spent hiring key staff members, planning inquiry strategy, discussing and redrafting report sections, and preparing the report for publication, the National Commission and the New Jersey Commission both had less than three months to hire research and investigative staff

and conduct and assemble research. The Mayor's Development Team in Detroit had ninety days to complete all operations. Constrained by pressures of time, recent riot commissions were forced to develop a general working theory of riot causation rather than the more sophisticated theory which they might have hoped to developed. In bare outline, this theory held that systematic deprivation and discrimination in the past, added to reasonable expectations of positive change, and accompanied by continued indignities and community resentments, can be focused by a single incident or series of incidents into hostilities which take the form of looting and other mass activities.

This is serviceable as a general theory, but it does not account for the variation in events which so noticeably characterized the composite picture. It does not help in providing answers to questions requiring comparative research techniques, such as those posed by the President concerning the outbreak of riots in some cities and not others, the tendency of some individuals toward riot participation and not others, and the relative impact of depressed conditions in the ghetto on the occurrence of riots.⁹ These questions require research techniques which cannot be developed on short notice or be quickly deployed and analyzed.¹⁰

The staff of the National Commission recognized that in some respects it would be impossible to mount the kind of research effort which would provide answers to some of the questions posed to the Commission. In the limited instances where the National Commission attempted to initiate research, in most cases it was unable to take full advantage of the findings and analyses. This research will undoubtedly provide useful data, but it will be future riot commissions which take advantage of the findings.¹¹

Problems of political legitimacy connected with research sometimes overshadow problems of social science. Commissioners with public constituencies require presentation of verifiable and unambiguous data in which they can have confidence. Commission staffs, anticipating these needs on the part of commissioners and anxious to maintain the confidence of commissioners, also recognize these requirements. Staff members, as good trial attorneys, work to "build a case." The National Commission returned to the field to obtain affidavits from witnesses on whose testimony the narrative summaries of disorders rested. Staff investigators of the New Jersey Commission were required to file individual memoranda on every person with whom they talked on commission business. Controversies in the New Jersey Commission were often settled by references to such documents and testimony. Much of the staff difficulties of commissions seems to revolve around the uneasy joining of well-conducted research, and the needs of public individuals who will have to affirm the findings.

The pressures of time are incompatible with rational research procedures because of problems relating to staffing. Staff directors are faced with the need to tool up quickly for the investigative effort

and the initiation of a plan to develop program proposals. The investigation must follow quickly because of the short time available in which to report, because of the need to interview witnesses while memories are still fresh, and because formulation of program solutions presumably depends upon the investigative effort. The extraordinary investigative effort of the National Commission, involving 21 riots in 20 cities, which eventually had to be accomplished in less than three months, suggests the rapid pace that these quasi-research efforts can assume.

Qualified and talented staff members did not prove readily available to recent commissions. Staff directors turned to the universities, but encountered difficulty in recruitment, particularly among academics with high status in their fields. Academics sometimes were skeptical of commission efforts. Prior commitments, particularly in the late summer months when staff was being sought, and the inconvenience of moving for short periods, often precluded acceptance of commission invitations.

In searching for non-academic staff members, commission directors discovered that availability was the single most important requisite for commission employment. The individuals most readily available for commission work proved to be residents of the cities in which the commissions were located, those who were unemployed, those who were engaged in a job where short term commitments are possible to arrange, or where professional status gains may accrue from commission participation. The unattractive aspects of commission work may account for the element of voluntarism that characterizes staff recruitment. These considerations help explain the heavy concentration on the National Commission and New Jersey Commission staffs of young lawyers, recent graduate students at the sub-doctoral level, personnel from other government agencies, and (in the case of the National Commission) recently returned Peace Corps volunteers. Also illustrative of the importance of availability in staffing, the most active staff of the Mayor's Development Team in Detroit were drawn from the heads of city agencies and the mayor's office because they could be easily released from other assignments. Regardless of the quality of staff work (which commission directors for the most part consider to have been good but uneven), the kinds of people who were available to staff recent riot commissions are not necessarily the kinds of people who would be sought if the most important goal was development of a thorough and comprehensive report not constrained by the demands of time.

Problems in staffing develop in a different form when the second stage of a commission's life is reached. When commissions begin to focus attention on the single task of producing the final document, the qualities that emerge as most important to successful performance are the ability to work all day and night, the capacity to absorb endless criticism without taking personal affront, and the ability to synthesize the sentiments of commissioners, or to anticipate their sentiments regarding various issues. These qualities again are those of lawyers

who work under pressure for clients regardless of personal interests. In this respect commission staff domination by lawyers may be a necessary, rather than an accidentally perverse, quality of commissions.¹² Thus we have the contradiction that those best able to gather and interpret socially relevant data may not perform well in accommodating to the pressures that comprise the final report writing process.

The pressures of time are also incompatible with rational search for answers in the sense that under rational procedures, study should be followed by conclusions, followed by program suggestions relating to those conclusions. Time constraints required that the recent riot commissions follow a process in which program formulation had to proceed concurrently with analysis of causes. This is not to say that their conclusions do not follow from the analysis. However, program proposals at the staff level began to be formulated at the same time that research into causes was going on.

Scarcity of resources also contributes to the organizational contradictions of riot commissions. Promised sufficient funds to accomplish their task at a time when public attention is focused on the chief executive, riot commissions can later experience difficulties in obtaining funds and resources. The National Commission was caught in the bind of the budget freeze pressures that every federal agency experienced in late 1967.

The National Commission had to obtain funds from government departments which themselves were under considerable financial constraints. Government officials who were being forced to pare their payrolls were not anxious to supplement the budget of a temporary agency soon to be disbanded. The decisions of the National Commission staff to recommend condensing the two planned reports (interim and final) into one, and to publish the report four months earlier than the scheduled July report date, in part were based upon a calculation of anticipated financing. The New Jersey Commission, starting with more modest budget assumptions, did not encounter financing problems, but was constrained originally in defining the scope of its inquiry by limitations on funding. Considerations of financing problems are not publicized, undoubtedly because of the implication that the reports would be less than authoritative if commissions were limited in funding all possible research.

3. Political Legitimacy and Scientific Investigation.

Aspects of the investigative efforts of riot commissions appear more related to attempts to establish the political legitimacy of the commission process than to contribute to the search for evidence and recommendations. Staffs must conduct commission inquiries so that they appear comprehensive in searching for explanations and program proposals, reliable in presentation of evidence, and cognizant of advanced work in various areas of research and program planning. These imperatives may or may not be related to standards of scientific legitimacy.

Staff directors must conserve scarce time. Yet they must appear to be receptive to all ideas, must consult widely with scholars so as to demonstrate (as well as assure) that they are aware of relevant ongoing research, and must seek the broadest base of witnesses so as to demonstrate the objective nature of the inquiry. Staff directors must also develop an evidential base to insure commissioner confidence in staff work. The creation of literally thousands of pages of testimony, immediately reproduced for commissioners, not only serves to refresh memories, but indicates the need to build a record on which to base a case. Significantly, there is no "political" record by which the public can comprehend the process of education and compromise resulting in commissioner consensus on a series of explanations and remedies for controversial social problems.

Commission staffs announce readiness to call a broad spectrum of witnesses, and invite commissioners to contribute suggestions to the witness list. But the calling of witnesses also relates to reassuring the public that the search conducted by the commission has been broad, and permits various interests to feel that they have been represented in commission councils. From the Mayors whose testimony formed the basis of the earliest newspaper accounts of National Commission activity, to the black militant Ernie Chambers, whose testimony later appeared in Ebony, all parties are given their day in court.¹³ Sometimes the ceremonial aspects of taking testimony are transparent, as when the National Commission took the testimony of many of the black militants who appear on the witness list at a period in the commission's life when some draft chapters already had been accepted in relatively final form. The search for evidence becomes a calculus of time use optimization limited by the recognition that the publics of the commissions' reports, and public officials, are not aware of the constraints under which commissions operate.

It is useful to distinguish between the tasks of describing riot events and recommending future action to prevent recurrence of riots. Commissions are asked to do both, although the tasks require different skills and capabilities. The investigative effort to reconstruct riot events is time consuming, laborious, and likely to prove politically threatening as judgments are made about the past performance of other

politicians.¹⁴ Commissions must choose between specifically criticizing individuals and institutions, or presenting a bland report without ascribing responsibility. Inquiry for purposes of recommending future action is of a different order. This aspect of the investigation cannot be definitive. Witnesses called to provide information for this aspect of a report reflect attempts to familiarize commissioners with a range of possible alternatives. The witness list will be scrutinized by experts in the field and assessed for the celebrity of coverage. But after these witnesses are heard, staff members must digest conflicting recommendations and develop program statements to which commissioners can agree. These sections are more controversial internally to commissions than are explanations of riots, because alternatives are greater and commissioners' political philosophies (and appeals to constituents) are challenged here more than in discussions of other sections. But reconstruction of riot events is likely to prove more controversial to commissions externally, insofar as commissions are willing to name names.

4. Commission Integration.

The central problem for individuals confronting commission organizational discrepancies and the conflicting expectations revolving around the scientific and political legitimacy of commission efforts is one of commission integration. To remain viable, complex organizations must develop mechanisms of socialization, and develop group norms and values, to counteract tendencies toward disintegration. This certainly obtains in the case of riot commissions, whose organizational life span is so short, and whose membership is comprised of individuals specifically chosen for their other organizational affiliations. Commission unity is explicitly considered a problem by staff directors. At least in retrospect commission personnel report awareness of the dangers of a divided commission, and indicate that they explicitly addressed themselves to creating conditions to increase commission cohesion.

On the New Jersey and National Commissions, staff directors faced the major problems of convincing staff and commissioners that they were neutrals both in partisanship and ideology. Ideological difficulties between staff and commissioners is a problem inherent in commissions, since there are likely to be systematic discrepancies between the values of commissioners--chosen by virtue of reputations and "representatives" of various strata--and staff--chosen by virtue of expertise and availability, and likely to be interested in the commission's work because of some social concern.¹⁵

The National Commission particularly was faced with problems of allaying fears, because in the context of Washington politics it was widely thought initially that the President would attempt to control the commission through the Executive Director and because Washington

political lore readily provided instances where conflicts among commissioners, and commissioner-staff conflicts, eroded confidence to the detriment of the commission reports. These fears dissipated as the commission's work progressed. The commission was explicitly bipartisan,¹⁶ and appointment of active and prominent Republicans as commissioners insured that an overtly partisan manipulation of the commission would be difficult to negotiate. Men with experience in Republican congressional staff assignments were also named to key staff positions. Some top staff members denied that party affiliation was influential in their appointment, but many staff members, regardless of the reasons for the appointments, considered these appointments safeguards against partisanship.

Staff directors approached commission duties openly and indicated that they had no particular agenda that they wished to press. Commissioners were continually asked to suggest topics for hearings, review hearing schedules, and make further suggestions for witnesses. Interviews with commission participants reveal that these open staff procedures were very important in allaying concerns over staff biases.

The ultimate spectre which looms for commission staff members is that of a minority report. For commissioners a minority report represents a threat with which, within limits, they can manipulate other commissioners to modify their views. But in a sense, a minority report is an ultimate weapon. One must still account for the more systematic, regularized erosion of career orientations of commissioners (in terms of which political individuals seek to identify themselves with political postures which conform to the expectations of their constituents) and for the development of report orientations of commissioners (in terms of which these same individuals identify themselves with the final commission product, at the possible expense of constituents expectations).

The work of recent riot commissions was aided by the sense of urgency which commissioners felt, and which increased as commission work progressed. Commission investigations helped to develop this sense of urgency. Direct exposure to ghetto conditions was perhaps the most successful technique of this sort. The National Commission conducted two day tours of riot areas for commissioners and attempted to make these tours without the company of the press corps or the guiding hands of city administrations. The New Jersey Commission arranged for commissioners to divide into teams of two and accompany anti-poverty workers into Newark ghetto homes, bars, and barber shops. These tours were almost uniformly credited with creating a sense of awareness of ghetto conditions which was ultimately reflected in the final reports. (Some commissioners, considering themselves knowledgeable about ghetto conditions, considered the tours useful for others.)

Another technique widely credited with being influential in creating a sense of urgency was commissioner exposure to certain witnesses with dramatic testimony. Dr. Kenneth Clark's appearance before the

commission, in which he expressed cynicism over the whole commission process, was influential in offering a perspective on the National Commission's business.¹⁷ The New Jersey commissioners were very impressed with the testimony of shopkeepers whose stores were shot up by policemen.¹⁸ Because these people were neither malcontents nor rioters, their testimony is credited by commissioners with converting one of the staunchest defenders of the State Police into an advocate of reform.

The developing dedication of commissioners was reinforced by the work schedules. While governmental commissions in the past have been considered hard working if they met more than once a month,¹⁹ the riot commissions displayed considerably more energy and involvement. The New Jersey Commission dedicated itself to work on the commission without commissioner representatives or substitution. This commission chose a short time compass, but decided that it would meet continuously and be a working commission, not one to ratify or reject staff contributions. Members of this commission pride themselves on their frequent departure from staff policy recommendations. One measure of the extent to which the heavy work schedule departed from even Governor Hughes' conceptualization of the commission is that one of its original members was supposed to commute from Washington to Trenton (or Newark) to attend commission sessions. The National Commission also enjoyed excellent attendance and met relatively frequently, particularly during the draft review stages.²⁰

In addition to demanding heavy work schedules, another by-product of the short time compass of recent riot commissions may have been the opportunity to learn about ghetto conditions without having to identify their positions on various policy issues. This facet of commission procedure in part was born of necessity. Staff work was not immediately available to commissioners, yet the commissions had to begin their studies as well as demonstrate to the public that they were at work. One way to do this was to study conditions at first hand. Thus commissioners learned about ghetto conditions and could agree on the nature of ghetto living before policy papers were prepared, and thus before it became necessary to "take sides."

Problems of potential fragmentation threaten commission unity at all stages of commission life. In the initial period, problems of fragmentation are most critical because report orientations may not yet have been developed. In later stages, conflicts are more prominent in commission affairs because commissioners must begin to take stands. But then report orientations may have developed which provide perspectives tending to minimize fragmentation. Loyalties to the potential report, and concern over its potential impact, may have taken over from the profusion of loyalties which formerly characterized commission members. We have not been able to explore fully this process of development of report orientations as opposed to career orientations. We do know that considerable conflict developed in the work of the commissions at the writing stages, and that these conflicts did not erupt to the

extent that minority reports were filed, or that public displays of conflict emerged. The National Commission did not break up over the issue of specifying the costs of programs, or over the appropriateness of criticizing major social institutions, or over the ultimate tone and emphasis of the report summary, although these were issues of considerable conflict. Neither did the New Jersey Commission fragment over the issue of recommending governmental consolidation for Essex County, although the commission was significantly divided over this. These concerns were managed through compromise or concession. Commissioners clearly preferred to accept compromise rather than diminish the total impact of the report through demonstrations of open conflict or sniping at the document. Members of both Commissions have refrained from dissociating themselves from aspects of the reports, and many have actively defended the reports, despite the controversies they have engendered.

Commission participants, particularly on the National Commission, are understandably reluctant to discuss areas of dispute among commissioners. They would like to give the impression that the reports emerged from objective study and that, in a sense, the conclusions reached were the only possible conclusions available to a group of honest men (and a woman). This reluctance is useful for the same reason that unanimity was useful to the court in Brown v. Board of Education: it prevents critics from diminishing the impact by demonstrating that some reasonable men differed from others, and that it was merely the liberal-conservative balance that accounts for the outcome. This approach to inquiries concerning commission divisions is understandable, but a more accurate picture of the commissions' work need not diminish the impact of the efforts. There were considerable disagreements on the commission. What is significant is that (so far as we can discover) there was little dispute over the causes of riots. There was agreement that the riots were not results of conspiracies, nor mass behavior dominated by criminal or quasi-criminal elements. Rather, commissioners chosen for the objectivity, community standing, and representativeness of established institutions-- in other words, individuals who were relatively conservative in the literal sense--attributed the riots to long standing factors of discrimination, deprivation and neglect. They condemned violence and criminal behavior, but recognized that riots could be understood as products of central tendencies in American life.

There was also no question that extraordinary measures would have to be taken if there were to be serious efforts to deal with the social bases of urban unrest. What debate there was concerned the kinds of measures that would have to be undertaken. But in the total picture disagreement over the nature of the recommendations is less significant than that radical departures from existing practices would be necessary. This is the significance of the commissions' reports, which stems from their political legitimacy.

The riot commissions, in their internal structures, are organizations charged with incompatible goals which cannot be fulfilled. We have identified some of the organizational constraints which characterize riot commissions, and have discussed briefly factors which account for the transformation of riot commissions from groups of individuals with career orientations to those in which report orientations predominate. In focusing upon organizational constraints and contradictions, we have attempted to assess briefly the extent to which commissions can be expected to approach scientific legitimacy, and the extent to which reports may be expected to gain political legitimacy. Thus far we have concentrated upon internal organizational factors obtaining to riot commissions. We will now extend the discussion to assess the organizational structure of commissions in their external aspects.

II

The Politics of Riot Commissions'
External Relations

The politics of riot commissions do not terminate upon the issuance of commission reports. Riot commissions continue to interact with other centers of power in the political system after their reports are released. The research interests of social scientists who have studied riot commissions, however, lead one to believe that the political importance of the commissions ends with the release of their reports.²¹ Yet an assessment of the place of riot commissions in the political process cannot neglect concern with public reception of commission efforts.

If the internal political processes of riot commissions are constrained by built-in contradictions, then the external relations of riot commissions are encumbered by inherently incompatible expectations. On the one hand there are expectations, often specified in the charge to commissions, that the task orientation of riot commissions is (and should be) directed toward producing reports and that the issuance of the reports marks the termination of the commissions' political activities.²² On the other hand there are expectations that the task performance of riot commissions extends beyond the making of recommendations to include the implementation of recommendations.²³ The latter expectation of involvement by riot commissions in the implementation process is placed under formidable constraints by the temporary nature of such commissions and by the expectation that commissions will not attempt to extend their activities beyond the issuance of reports.

In their external relations riot commissions can be understood as subsystems of the larger political system. A commission is established as an arm of the executive. The creating executive assigns it the function of articulating authoritative goals concerning the specific subject matters contained in the charge.²⁴ But the goals become authoritative for the larger political system only insofar as they are accepted and converted into public policy. In the absence of such conversion the recommendations remain only as political demands. They are purely recommendatory or advisory unless supportive relations are established with interest groups or other key actors that result in the conversion of recommendations into public policy.

Riot commissions are thus dependent upon other political actors for the implementation of their recommendations. They have no more power in their external relations than that which they are able to create for themselves by themselves. By their very titles riot commissions are "study commissions," "select commissions," or "advisory commissions" with no formal powers to bring about the implementation of recommendations. Riot commissions adopt a variety of strategies to overcome their relatively powerless status. These strategies,

listed in the order in which they are here considered, include:
1) maximizing the visibility of reports; 2) monopolizing legitimate interpretations of civil disorders, 3) issuing reassurances to otherwise aroused political groups, and 4) adopting perspectives that anticipate the needs of other political actors.

1. The Visibility of the Report.

Riot commissions attempt to manipulate their environment so as to give the greatest possible visibility to their reports. This concern is grounded in a desire to optimize the impact of the findings and the recommendations of the commissions. That riot commissions view it important at all to affect the environment into which their reports will be released indicates a political concern that extends beyond their immediate task orientation.

In pursuing the objective of increasing report visibility, riot commissions employ a number of tactics. Long before the release of the reports, commission deliberations are punctuated by considerations of how best to bring their reports to the attention of the public. Previously we noted the concern of commission members for producing unanimous reports as a means of optimizing their impact. Similarly, the writing of reports involves attention to stylistic considerations that are concerned with identifying the audience to which reports are addressed.

Like other institutions attempting to maximize their visibility, riot commissions pay significant attention to arranging for press conferences and otherwise influencing press reception. The National Commission and the New Jersey Commission placed calls to the editors of major newspapers and arranged the ground rules for press conferences. The commissions also sought to obtain maximum coverage on the date of release through advance distribution of the report to the news media. Releasing the report via the press conference increases public attention given to the work of the commissions to a greater extent than would routine submission of the reports to the president, governor or mayor. In addition to focusing attention on the report, press conferences also have provided evidence (through the presence of commission members) of the unanimous support of commissioners for commission findings and recommendations.

Resort to the use of the press conference, and other relations with the press, is not without perils. Unintended and undesirable consequences may result. Because of the length of the commission reports and the time and space limitations of the news media, coverage may be given to aspects of reports that overplay controversial sections. The National Commission released its report and a summary of the report to the press in advance. When the Washington Post indicated that it had obtained the summary elsewhere and would not honor the release date for the summary, the National Commission released the summary of the report three days in advance. While the summary of the report was not necessarily inconsistent with

the rest of the report, it did contain a tone not representative of the remainder of the report. The phrase "white racism," which appears but once in the summary of the report, captured the focus of the press to a greater extent than any other single finding reported by the commission. In a similar situation, the New Jersey Commission felt obligated to address the issue of official corruption in Newark because of repeated testimony on that subject by commission witnesses. The press coverage of the report upon release, especially in the local (Newark) press, gave a large amount of attention to the corruption issue which had a relatively minor place in the report itself. As one member of the New Jersey Commission related some four months after the release of the report:

In terms of what has happened to the report, we made a mistake in calling for a grand jury investigation of corruption in city hall. Not that that doesn't need to be done, but our discussion of that issue was picked up by the news media and given all the publicity. That single point in the Commission's report has been given more publicity than all the other issues combined.

In cases where commissions have foreknowledge of likely sympathetic reception of their reports by key political actors, they may use such persons at press conferences to give their work further visibility. An illustrative example of this tactic occurred when Detroit's Mayor Cavanagh received his commission's 750 page report. At the press conference he referred to it as, "'the most significant city document' ever produced in Detroit and said it would be used 'as a blueprint for the future.'"²⁵

2. Claims To Legitimacy

In an environment where various political actors, groups and governmental agencies contend with varying interpretations of civil disorders, riot commissions attempt to maximize their claim to political legitimacy in the interpretation of (and in the recommendations on) civil disorders. This attempt does not go uncontested. Others have access to legitimating symbols similar to those available to riot commissions. By resorting to the manipulation of such symbols, a threat is posed to the claim of riot commissions to a monopoly on legitimate inquiry into civil disorders. These counter-claims to legitimacy may take the form of what are here termed "competing riot commissions." The very creation of a riot commission by the president, a governor or a mayor may generate competing riot commissions. The competing commissions arise at the directive of antagonistic political authorities, groups opposed to the creator of the initial commission, and institutions in the private sector that perceive their interests to be at odds with those represented in the initial riot commission. The groups represented by the competing commissions

attempt to undermine the claim to a monopoly of legitimacy by the initial riot commissions, and attempt to establish claims to legitimacy of their own. In contending for legitimacy in the interpretation of civil disorders, antagonistic interests adopt the commission form in order to capitalize on this legitimating political instrument.

A variety of points in the life of the initially appointed commission can be located at which competing commissions and other challenges arise to dispute the initial commission's claim to legitimacy. Among factors encouraging competing commissions to form are: the absence of one of their members on the initial commission, the perception that the initial commission is "loaded" against their interests, the hostile reception of their representatives appearing as witnesses at the hearings of the initial commission, and the issuance of a report by the initial commission which is at odds with their views and interests. Figure I presents a listing of recent riot commissions along with the competing riot commissions or groups that arose to challenge the sole claim to legitimacy on the part of the initial commissions. The general type of interests represented by the commissions is specified and information on the point in time at which the competing commissions arose to challenge the initial commissions' claim to legitimacy is also included in the figure.

After President Johnson issued an executive order creating the National Commission, the United States Senate authorized the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee On Government Operations (McClellan Committee) "to make a full and complete study and investigation of riots...and measures necessary for their immediate and long-range prevention."²⁶ The McClellan Committee's investigations have attempted to undermine the findings of the National Commission by centering on Office of Economic Opportunity personnel involved in riots, hearing witnesses who allege that there is a conspiracy behind the riots, and generally giving a hostile reception to other witnesses not sympathetic with the committee's more conservative views. The fact that President Johnson included in his charge to the Eisenhower Commission the provision to investigate civil disorders is consistent with his other acts of unsympathetic reception of the report of the National Commission. The New Jersey Commission's "Report For Action" was released in February of 1968. Shortly thereafter, the New Jersey State Patrolmen's Benevolent Association's Riot Study Commission released its report entitled "A Challenge To Conscience." This report explains the creation of The Study Commission by saying, "had Governor Hughes named a police representative to his Commission, our own investigation would not have been necessary. It is unfortunate that although every other segment of our population was represented, the police were not."²⁷ In Detroit, Jerome Cavanagh's Mayor's Development Team represented a public response to local civil disorders with most commission members drawn from city agencies and the Mayor's Office. Here the New Detroit Committee arose as a private counter-thrust to the public commission. And in California the conservative McCone Commission was challenged, both as to its findings and its recommendations, by the California Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights.²⁸

FIGURE I

INITIAL RIOT COMMISSIONS AND "COMPETING RIOT COMMISSIONS"
LISTED BY INTERESTS REPRESENTED, WITH COMPETING
COMMISSIONS LISTED BY TIME OF ORIGIN

<u>Initial Riot Commission</u>	<u>Interests Represented</u>	<u>Competing Riot Commission</u>	<u>Interests Represented</u>	<u>Time of Origin of Competing Commission*</u>
National Commission	"Liberal"	McClellan Committee	"Conservative"	1
		Eisenhower Commission	"Conservative"	3
New Jersey Commission	"Liberal"	NJSPBA Commission	"Conservative"	1
Mayor's Development Team	"Public-Liberal"	New Detroit Committee	"Private-Liberal"	2
McCone Commission	"Conservative"	California Advisory Commission of USCCR	"Liberal"	3

*Note: 1--arising because of absence of one of their members on the initial commission.
 2--arising upon perception of initial commission being "loaded" against their interests.
 3--arising upon issuance of a report by initial commission which did not reflect their interests.

These competing commissions employ many of the same strategies and tactics as official riot commissions in manipulating the symbols of legitimacy. They follow closely the procedures of the initial commissions, including assembling a staff, holding formal hearings, conducting investigations, hearing witnesses, collecting documents, and offering recommendations. Not only is the form of competing riot commissions similar to that of the initial commissions, but their informational content is likewise similar. Competing commissions often hear many of the same witnesses, collect the same documents, and conduct similar investigations. But their findings and recommendations vary considerably from the initial commissions' conclusions. The nature of riot commission reports is, therefore, not so much a product of the information reaching the commissions as it is the selective attention to that information by the commissions. And it appears that competing commissions' selective attention to the information before them is based upon the predominant political interests represented. The issuing of contradictory reports by competing riot commissions represents a challenge to the initial commissions' self-claimed status as legitimate interpreter of civil disorders.

Competing riot commissions contend for political legitimacy by manipulating other symbols of authority as well. The commission of the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association in New Jersey held its meetings and conducted its hearings in Newark's city hall with the direct approval of a city administration that was to bear the brunt of the New Jersey Commission's most severe findings and recommendations. Other riot commissions also may use arguments about the thoroughness of their investigations (especially as that thoroughness is contained in the charge to the commission) as a means of competing for political legitimacy. Still other commissions point to the more representative nature of their membership in an attempt to claim political legitimacy.

An important ingredient in a commission's ability to claim political legitimacy for its inquiry into civil disorders appears to be the relative absence of criticism from its staff after the report of the commission has been released. This is particularly true of the social scientists who served in staff capacities. In the National Commission and the New Jersey Commission it has been difficult to obtain interviews with some staff members because of their desire to protect what they view as significant documents on civil disorders. This generally favorable view of social scientists toward these two commissions is to be contrasted with the wrath directed at the McCone Commission by some of its social science staff members.²⁹

3. Reassurances And Recommendations.

Riot commission reports can be analyzed as attempts by the commissions to reassure publics in an otherwise unsettled environment.³⁰ These reassuring findings are aimed at dispelling popular rumors and myths while at the same time interpreting disturbing events in the context of traditional American beliefs.

While commissions are concerned about reassuring the public that otherwise feels threatened, they are also concerned with advancing programmatic recommendations that, by their very nature, are politically controversial. In advancing recommendations, riot commissions set forth demands upon the larger political system. The commissions and individual commissioners are placed in an advocate role in the political process. This involvement in the political process places them in politically controversial areas and gives rise to a basic contradiction in the post-report relations of the commissions. This contradiction is between the reassuring functions (directed toward the mass public) and the programmatic functions (directed toward advancing recommendations) of riot commissions. Not only is there a basic contradiction here in the external relations, but in advancing programmatic recommendations riot commissions articulate goals favorable to only some of the more specific political publics. In doing so, of course, they run the risk of arousing other specific political publics and groups whose interests are not reflected in the recommendations. Thus in producing political reassurances among groups and political publics whose interests

are reflected in the goals of the commission, others whose interests are not represented may become aroused.

Popular discussions and statements by public officials in the immediate aftermath of civil disorders in recent years give credence to the "conspiracy theory" as the cause of the disorders.³¹ The arguments of the discussions range from the role of "agitators" in "the contagion of riots" to a view that sniping activity in arson areas could only occur with pre-planning. Not only have riot commissions addressed themselves to the conspiracy theory, they also have gone to some length in challenging its validity and attempting to lay the myths and rumors to rest.³²

Beyond the dispelling of myths and rumors, riot commissions also involve themselves in the reaffirmation of traditionally accepted views of society. Commissions uniformly invoke traditional views against violence.³³ They also reaffirm the principle of "law and order."³⁴ And in the face of violence, they further invoke the traditionally accepted (if not practiced) view of American society articulated in the American creed.³⁵ Reaffirmation of the American creed, especially as that series of beliefs pertains to "equality" and "integration," is a common feature in the rhetoric of riot commissions.

Why this attention to myth, rumor, resort to violence and the American creed? Beyond the reassuring function served by such language, the appeals to traditionally accepted values also enhance the claims of riot commissions to a monopoly on political legitimacy. The values of the reaffirmed American creed set the framework for the reports of the commissions. It becomes more difficult for other groups and political actors to challenge the findings of riot commissions in light of the incorporation of dispelled myths and rumors and appeals to widely accepted traditional values in the reports. But the success of riot commissions in placating the mass public is problematically related to the content of the commission reports. The inability of riot commissions fully to reassure all elements of a divided society indicates another reason for the rise of competing commissions which attempt to undermine the sole claim to political legitimacy by the initial commissions.

The inability of riot commissions to reassure divided publics is related, at least in part, to the controversial nature of the recommendations they advance. Even with the reaffirmation of traditional values, only some of the interests of the divided publics will benefit from the programmatic recommendations of the commission. In the New Jersey Commission, for example, a conscious decision was made to concentrate the commission's report on the city of Newark. As related by members of the commission, this decision was made to reassure the black community of Newark that their grievances had been heard and would be given voice through the commission report. But the choice of reassuring this specific public was not without its difficulties. It gave rise to major differences within the commission on how to best translate these reassurances into programmatic recommendations. The

most divisive issue within the New Jersey Commission was related to the question of political consolidation. One-half of the commissioners argued that political consolidation was the only means of establishing a tax base that would allow Newark to solve its problems. They argued that in the long run this would yield the greatest benefit to Negroes in Newark. Other commissioners argued against political consolidation on the grounds that this would, in effect, disenfranchise black people in Newark precisely at the time when their numbers had grown to constitute a majority of the city electorate. The first argument risked disturbing white suburbanites upon whom the commission felt dependent for implementation of recommendations directed at the state government. The second argument risked assuring Negroes of electoral success without the resources to provide basic services.

The National Commission, after rejecting the conspiracy theory and invoking traditional language concerning violence, offered an explanation of disorders that was intended to disturb the white majority. The commissioners asserted that among the causes of the civil disorders were the attitudes of the white majority and the reflection of those attitudes in white-dominated institutions. Recommendations consistent with this interpretation were directed toward a change of attitudes and clearly contrast with the earlier described assurances of the commission's report.

In Detroit the Mayor's Development Team did not address the question of conspiracy or the role of violence in the city. Neither did it dwell on equality and integration as elements of the American creed. Rather, it directed its efforts at the more specific political publics within the city's administrative and service structure. As such, the Detroit Commission has not had the effect of reassuring the general public or quieting more specifically aroused political publics.³⁶ Rather it has activated city agencies, and more particularly the clientele of those agencies, in defense of their former patterns of interaction with other centers of power in the city.

On the basis of these examples we may offer an additional contradiction in the external relations of riot commissions. The riot commissions' task of reassuring the public is incompatible with the issuance of controversial programmatic recommendations.

4. Strategies For Implementation.

Earlier we described the existence of expectations that the work of riot commissions extends beyond the making of recommendations to include the implementation of those recommendations. We also described at length the constraints placed on the ability of riot commissions to fulfill these expectations. In large part the temporary nature of riot commissions as organizations accounted for such constraints. Riot commissions, however, do attempt to overcome the constraints imposed by their temporary nature. Among the techniques adopted to further supplement the commissions' efforts at implementation are:

to treat gently riot-related behavior of the executive; to extend the life of the commission; to anticipate the needs of key political actors; and, as individuals, to lobby for the adoption of the commission's programmatic recommendations.

Riot commissions are faced with the problem of adopting strategies that will maximize the acceptability of their reports to other centers of power. Because of the relative absence of power on the part of the commissions, they are dependent upon the favorable reception of their reports by the executive for maximum impact on the larger political system. However, these same political executives may have been involved in dealing with the control of the civil disorders and with programs related to the basic causes of the disorders. Thus the possibility is raised of commissions having to deal critically with the behavior of the political executives upon whom they are at least partially dependent for the implementation of recommendations.

The virtual absence of criticism of the executive in commission reports cannot be explained on the basis of intervention by the executive in the deliberations of the commissions. Most creating executives of recent riot commissions did not exercise veto powers over the contents of commission reports. In some cases the executive veto was practically impossible.³⁷ The absence of criticism of the executive seems, rather, to be related to the commissions' dependence upon the executive in the implementation process. And this dependence on other centers of power is intrinsic to the process of recommendation implementation.³⁸

The exoneration of executive behavior concerning civil disorders is not only important in terms of what remains to be told of the full disorder story. It also gives credence to competing riot commissions in challenging the initial commissions' claims to legitimacy. The New Jersey Commission strongly criticized the city administration in Newark. It left virtually untouched any discussion of the governor's behavior or statements at the time of the disorder which were widely perceived by the black community in Newark to be inflammatory. The reaction of city officials in Newark to the New Jersey Commission's report was to point out the discrepancy between the commission's statements about the Mayor of Newark and the Governor of New Jersey. Similar reactions were voiced by the Riot Study Commission of The New Jersey State Patrolmen's Benevolent Association.

In the implementation process, riot commissions may adopt the strategy of extending their life in one form or another. After the issuance of the commission report, a number of commissioners and staff may be selected to be involved with the implementation of the recommendations. Where this approach has been adopted its major drawback has been a lack of power. If riot commissions themselves have relatively little power, then a few of the commission members have even less power in the implementation process. The McCone Commission chose this means for advancing its recommendations. It originally called for the entire commission to reconvene periodically,³⁹ but in fact only the chairman and the vice-chairman have met.⁴⁰ Use

of this technique has been singularly unsuccessful in achieving the implementation of this commission's recommendations. One commentator indicates that what the periodic review has actually accomplished has been "defending itself (the commission) against some of the attacks which have been made upon it," and serving a public relations function.⁴¹ Near the end of the New Jersey Commission's deliberations a request was made to the governor to establish an on-going review body, including some members of the commission.⁴² The request, however, was never favorably acted upon by the governor.

Riot commissions also attempt to further their recommendations by anticipating the needs of other political elites. The National Commission at one point adopted an end-of-the-year deadline for its interim report in part to obtain consideration in the formulation of the President's budget messages. The National Commission also adopted the President's "message on the cities" as a framework for some of their programmatic recommendations anticipating that this would coincide with his legislative goals. The National Commission also consulted with cabinet officers before releasing its report. This strategy was based on the assumption that the President would use the commission's recommendations as a tool for furthering his own domestic program.

The New Jersey Commission set a target date of January 1, 1968 for the release of its report. The tactic was aimed at anticipating the needs of the Governor in his annual message to the state legislature. By releasing its report at this time the commission sought to merge its implementation interests with the needs of the Governor in his annual message. However, the commission did not meet its deadline and the tactic failed.

Beyond the collective strategies of commissions, individual commissioners may also adopt techniques intended at furthering the commission recommendations. An initial silence from Governor Hughes toward the New Jersey Commission's report, for example, was met by the threat from individual members of the commission that they were about to criticize the Governor in the press for his failure to respond. Shortly thereafter the Governor and his staff received members of the commission and in an all day session virtually wrote the Governor's special message to the legislature. This message, which called for expenditures of \$126.1 million on welfare, housing, education, law enforcement, and urban problems, incorporated most of the commission's recommendations pertaining to the state government in New Jersey.⁴³ Individual commissioners have also chosen to speak before various groups (often groups opposed to the commission's findings) to bring their recommendations to public awareness. Others may adopt the principles embodied in the commission report for their own private business or public agency. This type of individual response represents the extension of the commissioners' report orientations into their career endeavors.

In Detroit individual commissioners have attempted to carry out the policies articulated by the Mayor's Development Team. While riot

commissions themselves are relatively powerless bodies, individual members of riot commissions may be located in positions of power. Because the Detroit Commission was composed of high level city-employees, members of the Mayor's office and department heads, the policies pursued by individual commissioners have, in many instances, become the policy of the city of Detroit.

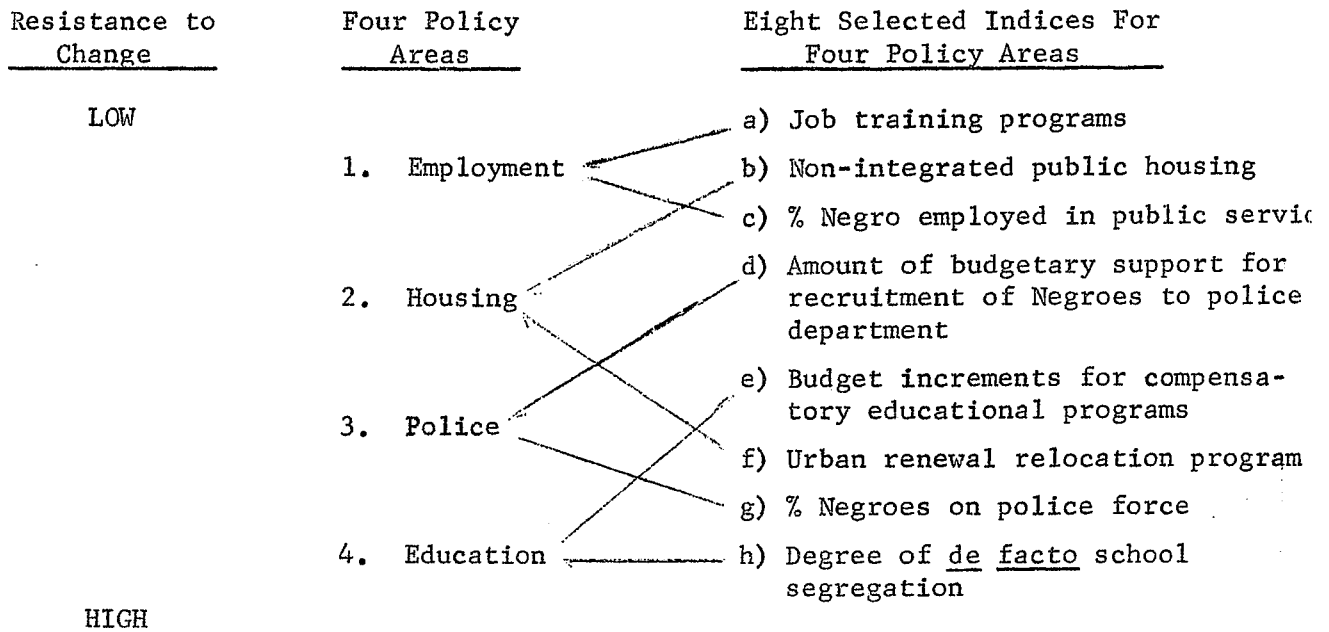
5. Implementation of Recommendations.

Involvement of riot commissions in the political process as advocates of their recommendations raises larger questions concerning which policy areas are most resistant to change and under what circumstances commission recommendations will be implemented.⁴⁴ Because research in this area is continuing and not all of the evidence is in, the following discussion is quite tentative. Nevertheless, some preliminary hypotheses that we are now attempting to refine may be advanced.

The first hypothesis concerns the degree to which specified policy areas are amenable to change. In our ongoing research we have chosen to look at four policy areas: education, employment, housing and police.⁴⁵ On the basis of the preliminary data from three cities, a pattern emerges in the degree of difficulty in producing change on a policy-by-policy basis. Figure II presents a description of changes in the four policy areas, ranking the policy areas on the basis of the degree of resistance to change. The figure also presents a list of eight selected components of the four policy areas. Examination of these components suggests that resistance to change is positively related to the psychological closeness of whites to blacks within the policy areas. That is, the closer the psychological threat to whites of changes in program areas, the greater the resistance to change. This finding is consistent with the conclusions of other studies in minority group relations on change and the resistance to change.⁴⁶

A second hypothesis on the implementation of recommendations in the four policy areas pertains to city-by-city comparisons. Our working hypothesis here is that the direction and the degree of change in post-riot urban race relations is related to the racial climate prevailing in the community before the civil disorders. This in turn is related to the environmental characteristics of the community (especially the percent Negro in the community).⁴⁷ In one city there has been a response to racial violence that may be termed "ameliorative." In three of four policy areas considerable changes have occurred that can only be interpreted as favorable to the interests of the black community. Within the three ameliorative policy areas there are, of course, continuations of unfavorable policies. Nevertheless, positive changes are also being effected. In another city, very little meaningful change has taken place with the exception of one policy area. The activity that has taken place since the riot and since the release of the riot commission's report has in large part, been

FIGURE II

RESISTANCE TO CHANGE IN FOUR POLICY AREAS

structural in nature.⁴⁸ This static response holds for all but one policy area where, interestingly, it is not city hall but the private sector which has produced considerable policy changes. Finally, in a third city the response to racial violence and to recommendations advanced by riot commissions has been punitive in nature. There has not been measurable change in any of the four policy areas that can be interpreted as favorable to the interests of the black community. In all but one of the policy areas, in fact, there has been a general movement in policy terms against the interests of the black community.

If one extends the above analysis back in time previous to the civil disorders in the three cities a similar relationship holds for the three cities. The political system in the first city has in the past been more ameliorative in its public policy towards Negroes, in the third city more punitive, and in the second city somewhere in-between these polar opposites. The net effect of the occurrence of racial violence and the offering of recommendations by riot commissions in our three cities thus appears to be a "speed-up" in the original direction of public policy.

III.

CONCLUSION

In the immediate aftermath of massive occurrences of racial violence (or even while such violence is continuing) a common response by key political executives is the creation of official riot commissions. These select or advisory commissions appear with sufficient regularity to allow social scientists to make informed observations on the reasons for creation of the commissions and the functions served by them.

Few social phenomena represent more of a crisis situation to political executives than does the occurrence of civil disorders. In an unsettled environment, political executives attempt to restore stable patterns of behavior through the creation of riot commissions. Blacks and whites feel threatened by their surroundings and political executives perceive the need for immediate actions intended to reassure an insecure public. Yet meaningful immediate action is not a ready executive recourse. The creation of a select, or advisory commission, as in other circumstances in which executives may find it desirable to postpone decisions on other action, is one mechanism immediately available to executives that gives the appearance of "something being done."⁴⁹

But the creation of riot commissions gives rise to expectations that conditions leading to riots will be thoroughly and objectively analyzed, and programs designed to diminish the incidence of riots in the future will be enacted. These expectations in a sense are demands, the contents of which are determined by the value orientations of various groups in the society. Blacks and white liberals "demand" analysis of underlying causes which will be translated into programmatic action directed at the roots of racism. Other groups "demand" supportive statements for police, advocacy of suppressive measures, and analysis of lawlessness which will result in eliminating the proximate causes of civil disorders. The creation of riot commissions deflects pressures for other immediate action and directs these pressures toward an arena in the future where the political system will respond to disorders under more stable patterns of political interaction. This deflection is basically conservative in the classical use of the term. It tends to diminish the likelihood that abrupt changes will result from pressures of an aroused and fearful white majority. Similarly, it tends to diminish the likelihood that progressive changes generated in moments of crisis will be advanced.

In issuing reports, riot commissions themselves create new demands with which other political actors must deal. Expectations remain that recommendations will encounter support from politicians who created the commissions initially, and to whom recommendations are addressed. These expectations are the complement to creating riot commissions in the first place, since deflection of immediate demands for action is only credible if accompanied by expectations that future recommendations of the high status commission will be supported.

For reasons pertaining to the organizational contradictions discussed in this paper, however, public expectations of obtaining meaningful and sophisticated understandings of riots are unrealistic. Pressures of time and the nature of commission capabilities suggest that commissions can best produce official reports (or interpretations) whose strengths lie in the fact that a disparate group of men agree to a single document with interpretations which may be at odds with their public images. Expectations that recommendations of commissions will be translated into policy are similarly unrealistic because of the relative powerlessness of commissions in the political process. The commissions have no apparent constituency, no ready support system, and no formal, legal sanctions to deploy against other political actors or groups. Commissions' powers are in persuasion, but in entering the competition for the allegiance of elites and various publics they find themselves in competition with other groups with similar resources.

Observations that commissions have repeatedly come to the same analysis, recommended similar programs, and failed to produce action may be misdirected. It is not the commissions themselves to which one must look to understand the "Alice in Wonderland" pattern that Dr. Clark perceived. It is to the place of riot commissions in the political process that attention should be addressed.

FOOTNOTES

¹Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (New York, 1968) (Bantam Edition), p. 483 (hereafter referred to as the NCCD Report). For convenience, all references in this paper will be to the Bantam Edition. We will use the terms "riot commission" and "commission" interchangeably, except where noted.

²We are grateful to Kenneth Dolbeare and Murray Edelman for their comments on an earlier draft. We are indebted to the many people connected with recent commissions who have contributed to our work. Responsibility for errors of fact and judgement are solely ours.

A systematic study of riot commissions in the past or present has not been undertaken to our knowledge. Literature dealing with contemporary riot commissions includes: Robert Blauner, "Whitewash Over Watts," Trans-action III (1966); and Robert M. Fogelson, "White on Black: A Critique of the McCone Commission Report on the Los Angeles Riots," Political Science Quarterly Vol. LXXXII (September, 1967), No. 3. For contemporary riot commissions see also, Bayard Rustin, "The Watts 'Manifesto' and the McCone Report," Commentary, XLI (1966), and Paul Jacobs, Prelude To Riot: A View of Urban America From the Bottom (New York: Random House, 1967), Chapter 7. For riot commissions of the past the best work is Waskow's analysis of the 1919 riots and subsequent riot commissions, see, Arthur I. Waskow, From Race Riot To Sit In (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1966).

³NCCD Report, pp. 536-37.

⁴In this paper we have concentrated more heavily on the National Commission and the New Jersey Commission than on the three city analysis. This attempt to place riot commission politics in theoretical perspective is based upon over sixty interviews with commissioners and staff members of the National Commission, the New Jersey Commission, commissions in three cities, and other relevant public figures. It is also based upon public documents, commission files, and newspaper reports, as well as historical material. We have not completed our investigations, however, and therefore consider our findings and formulations tentative.

⁵See the discussion of group pressures and organizational demands, in James March and Herbert Simon, Organizations (New York, 1958), p. 78. For the most part, the literature on organizational theory has not proved useful because of the peculiar nature of recent riot commissions as temporary organizations with severely delimited organizational lives in which behavior is overwhelmingly affected by the pressures of time.

⁶See Amitai Etzioni, "Organizational Control Structure," in Handbook of Organizations, James March, ed. (Chicago, 1965), pp. 650-77, and references cited there.

⁷ See the discussion of inducements to participate in organizations in March and Simon, pp. 93 ff. See also the seminal discussion in Chester Barnard, The Functions of the Executive (Cambridge, Mass., 1938).

⁸ March and Simon suggest that time pressures may invigorate organizational operations, but that this invigoration may be increasingly unproductive, and "acceptable" alternative strategies may be redefined and compromised, as time pressures are pushed to the limits. These hypotheses seem applicable to the study of riot commissions. See p. 116. See also the discussion of "synthetic," ad hoc organizations in James D. Thompson, Organizations in Action, (New York, 1967), pp. 52-55. We thank Gail MacColl for providing this reference.

⁹ See the President's "Remarks" to the Commission, in Report, NCCD Report, pp. 536-37. Governor Hughes made similar inquiries of the New Jersey Commission. See "Statement," in Report for Action: Governor's Select Committee on Civil Disorder, State of New Jersey (February, 1968), pp. 199-202 (hereafter referred to as NJC Report).

¹⁰ Illustratively, the National Commission initiated a survey of communications media riot coverage to explore an issue about which much was being said but little was known. The Report provides some interesting summary data on the content of television and newspaper coverage. But the thoughtful section on the Mass Media in the Report primarily discusses problems revealed through other sources, such as the Poughkeepsie conference of media representatives, which the Commission sponsored. It appears that in framing its recommendations the Commission drew upon evidence other than the research it commissioned.

¹¹ The National Commission recently released reports on some of this research. See The New York Times, July 28, 1968, p. 1.

¹² Cf. the remarks of Amitai Etzioni in The Wall Street Journal, July 9, 1968.

¹³ Commissions may unintentionally reward or sanction groups by the reception given to their representatives at hearings. The embarrassment of one big city police chief by a National Commission member significantly affected the perception of this man regarding commission objectivity and regard for his performance of duty, according to interviews with officials in that city.

¹⁴ The burdensome nature of the responsibility for recreating the story of the riots was sufficiently clear to the Chairman of the New Jersey Commission that he urged Governor Hughes not to charge the Commission with describing the riot events. Illustrative of this point, consider the fact that the National Commission generally

14 (continued)

concluded that: "Actions to ameliorate Negro grievances in the 20 cities surveyed were limited and sporadic. With few exceptions, these actions cannot be said to have contributed significantly to reducing the level of tension." (P. 154) Yet with few exceptions the examples which follow, drawn from the commission's investigative effort, report ameliorative actions that were taken. Only inferentially is there support for the general conclusion that "actions...were limited and sporadic." See pp. 154-57.

¹⁵ Some members of the National Commission assigned their own representatives to work with the staff. Some regular commission staff members, however, were thought by fellow staff members to "represent" certain commissioners. This probably helped quiet some anxieties by creating the impression that individuals on the staff were in positions to monitor partisan concerns. See the discussion of sources of differential perception based upon differential goal orientations, in March and Simon, pp. 127 ff.

¹⁶ NCCD Report, p. 537.

¹⁷ Robert Fogelson's critique of the McCone Commission's work is similarly credited by National Commission and New Jersey Commission personnel with presenting a sobering warning of the kind of criticisms to which commissions could be subjected.

¹⁸ See NJC Report, pp. 119-22, 143-44. This was confirmed in interviews with commissioners.

¹⁹ Daniel Bell has said of the National Commission on Technology, Automation and Economic Progress, for example, that the "Commission worked hard. It met regularly in Washington for a minimum of two full days a month, for about eleven months...." Daniel Bell, "Government by Commission," The Public Interest, Spring, 1966, p. 3.

²⁰ NCCD Report, p. 575. One of the few influences of the press on the commission process during preparation of reports appears to be to assure commissioner attendance by frequently inquiring about attendance of various members.

²¹ See Blauner and Fogelson, previously cited.

²² The charge to the National Commission specifies that it "shall terminate upon presenting its final report and recommendations," NCCD Report, p. 535.

²³ Note the New Jersey Commission's implicit expectation in the following comment from their Report For Action, "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...The mood in our cities clearly indicates that commissions like ours will have outlived their usefulness unless action is forthcoming from their recommendations." NJC Report, p. x.

²⁴President Johnson's charge to the National Commission reads, in part, "We are looking to you...to guide us and to guide the country." NCCD Report, p. 537. Similarly Governor Hughes charged the New Jersey Commission, among other things: "It is most important that the Commission...shall point the way to the remedies which must be adopted by New Jersey and by the nation to immunize our society from a repetition of these disasters." NJC Report, p. 199. Also note the Detroit Commission's self-description of its role: "the Development Team set about to do what it could to indicate new directions to be taken and bold approaches to be made by the City." MDT Report, p. 10.

²⁵Milwaukee Journal, October 30, 1967, p. 8, part 1.

²⁶U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Government Operations, Riots, Civil and Criminal Disorders, before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, United States Senate, 90th Cong., 1st sess., 1967, p. 1, part 1.

²⁷New Jersey State Patrolmen's Benevolent Association, "A Challenge To Conscience: A Summary of the Report of the Riot Study Commission," May, 1968, p. 4.

²⁸California Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights, "An Analysis of the McCone Commission Report" (Jan. 1966).

²⁹See especially Blauner on this issue.

³⁰Murray Edelman has argued persuasively for the inclusion of analysis of symbolic reassurances as an integral feature of the governmental process. See, Murray Edelman, The Symbolic Uses of Politics, (Urbana, 1967), especially pp. 41-43, 188-194.

³¹Waskow indicates that the conspiracy question was popular in earlier riots as well. See his discussion of the "Red Summer" of 1919. Waskow, pp. 12 ff., 186-187.

³²See the NJC Report, p. 142, and the NCCD Report, Chapter 3.

³³The National Commission commented, "Violence cannot build a better society. Disruption and disorder nourish repression, not justice. They strike at the freedom of every citizen. The community cannot--it will not-- tolerate coercion and mob rule." NCCD Report, p. 2. The New Jersey Commission said, "The illusion is that force alone will solve the problem. 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." NJC Report, p. xii.

³⁴Allan Silver has perceptively written that the demand for traditionally accepted definitions of "law and order" by riot commissions is a product of professional, upper and middle class backgrounds of those who are called upon to give official interpretations of violence. See, Allan Silver, "Official Interpretations of Racial Riot," (unpublished paper delivered at the Academy of Political Science's Conference on "Urban Riots: Violence and Social Change," Columbia University, April 19, 1968. See also, Allan Silver, "The Demand For Order In Civil Society," in David Bordua (ed.), The Police (New York, 1967), pp. 1-24.

³⁵The classic statement of the "American Creed" is contained in Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma (New York, 1944).

³⁶In Detroit, probably to a greater extent than in most other cities which have experienced civil disorders, the aftermath of the disorders has been marked by an unprecedented proliferation of extremist groups (both black and white). A manifestation of the polarization taking place is in the buying of arms by citizens. At one point, Mayor Cavanagh addressed the citizens of Detroit saying, "Victimized by rumors, the citizens of Detroit--both Negro and white--are arming themselves in unprecedented numbers. And, in the suburbs surrounding Detroit, gun sales have also soared. This arms race must be stopped. We must return to sanity." "Report to the People," by Mayor Jerome Cavanagh, March 6, 1968. The newspaper strike in Detroit may also have contributed to this polarization.

³⁷For instance, the New Jersey Commission made pre-release copies of its report available to the press before the Governor received his copy.

³⁸Commissioners who are political allies of the appointing executive may have other reasons for withholding criticism.

³⁹The commission's letter of transmittal states, "We recommend that the Commission reconvene periodically to review actions taken to implement the recommendations in our report, with the next meeting to be held in the summer of 1966," Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, Violence In The City--An End or A Beginning? (Dec. 2, 1965).

⁴⁰Paul Jacobs, Prelude to Riot (New York, 1967), p. 282.

⁴¹Ibid. For the actual reports of the extended commissions see, Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, Staff Report of Actions Taken To Implement The Recommendations in The Commission's Report: Status Report I (August, 1966), and Status Report II (August 18, 1967).

⁴²Letter from Chairman Lilley to Governor Hughes, February 7, 1968, in the files of the New Jersey Commission.

⁴³See, "A Moral Recommitment For New Jersey," Special Message of Governor Hughes to the New Jersey Legislature (April 25, 1968).

⁴⁴That this may be the most significant question raised in this discussion has been indicated by the Los Angeles Riot Study. See, Nathan E. Cohen, "Press Release: The Los Angeles Riot Study" (n.p., dated August 1, 1967), pp. 10-11.

⁴⁵These areas of investigation were selected because the first three policy areas are the most frequently mentioned "basic causes" of civil disorders, while the police are most frequently involved in the precipitating incidents of civil disorders. Furthermore, all of the riot commissions discussed in this essay investigated these four policy areas and advanced recommendations related to change in each of them.

⁴⁶For references on this subject, see H. M. Blalock, Jr., Toward a Theory of Minority Group Relations (New York, 1967), p. 146.

⁴⁷On the importance of examining racial climates in comparative studies of city politics, see, Herbert Jacob and Michael Lipsky, "Outputs, Structure, and Power: An Assessment of Changes In the Study of State and Local Politics," Journal of Politics, Vol. 30, No. 2 (May, 1968), p. 528-29.

⁴⁸"Structural" policy change may be symbolic or tangible in nature. Structural reorganization is a constant feature of the changes occurring in all of our three cities. Such structural changes become tangible in nature in the degree to which they carry with them changes in power relations that result in the redistribution of material rewards. To the extent that they leave power relations untouched, structural changes are symbolic in nature. The important variable in determining the nature of structural changes is the social-structural location of power in the change that takes place. Structural change becomes symbolic or tangible in terms of the presence or absence of the redistribution of power accompanying the structural change.

⁴⁹This function of establishing commissions and study committees frequently has been noted by political scientists. See, e.g., David Truman, The Governmental Process (New York, 1951), p. 435.