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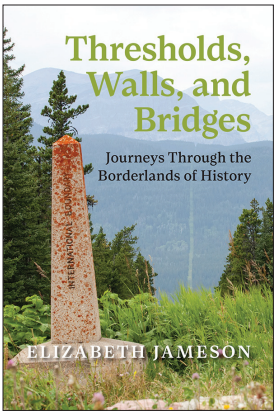

THRESHOLDS, WALLS, AND BRIDGES: JOURNEYS THROUGH THE BORDERLANDS OF HISTORY

by Elizabeth Jameson

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Race in America: Reflections on the 40th Anniversary of the Kerner Commission Report

April 10, 2008

On March 18, 2008, Senator Barack Obama announced with blunt understatement, "[R]ace is an issue that I believe this nation cannot afford to ignore right now."[1] The United States has always ignored race only at enduring peril to its founding principles. During the 2008 presidential primaries, the first serious Latinx, African American, and woman presidential contenders drew attention to historic changes since the U.S. Civil Rights and Women's Liberation Movements challenged racial and gender inequality. Then, in March and April 2008, reports about Obama's pastor, Reverend Jeremiah Wright, redirected the focus to race as an issue in electoral politics. Rev. Wright, had, among many statements in his long career, called the United States "racist."[2]

As both major parties conducted presidential primaries, in March and April the U.S. media also focused on two landmark anniversaries in the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. March 1, 2008 marked forty years since the publication of the report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders; April 4, the fortieth anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.[3] Journalists focused particularly on Dr. King's leadership in the southern Civil Rights movement, culminating with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Both were major victories for African Americans, and for President Lyndon Johnson, who invited Dr. King to the White House signing ceremonies.

Then, from 1964–1968, the focus of Black discontent seemed to shift, and tactics moved away from the South and from nonviolent civil disobedience. As so-called "ghetto riots" erupted in one city after another,

Blacks seized control from the police and property from local merchants.[4] The search for causes and meaning began after the 1965 riot in the Watts section of Los Angeles and peaked in the half-year scramble for a "theory" of riot causation by the commission President Johnson appointed to investigate 165 riots that rocked the nation in the summer of 1967.

President Johnson addressed a stunned nation the night of July 27, 1967. Detroit smoldered under U.S. army occupation in the final hours of a riot that had erupted four days earlier. Seven northern New Jersey communities were reeling from disturbances that began July 12 in Newark and ended in Englewood July 26. Officials in the small Maryland shore community of Cambridge charged that H. Rap Brown, national chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, had instigated a riot there the night of July 24. Mayors and police chiefs throughout the country braced for impending violence as the President announced plans to appoint a special commission.[5] On July 29, he signed Executive Order 11365, Establishing a National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, charged to investigate and make recommendations with respect to:

> (1) The origins of the recent major civil disorders in our cities, including the basic causes and factors leading to such disorders and the influence, if any, of organizations or individuals dedicated to the incitement or encouragement of violence; (2) The development of methods and techniques for averting or controlling such disorders. . . .; (3) The appropriate role of the local, state, and Federal authorities in dealing with civil disorders; and (4) Such other matters as the President may place before [it].[6]

Critics charged that Johnson had the answers on July 27. "The only genuine, long-range solution," he said, was an "attack—mounted at every level—upon the conditions that breed despair and violence. All of us know what these conditions are: ignorance, discrimination, slums, poverty, disease, not enough jobs."[7] Gordon Lightfoot voiced his cynical reaction to the official response in his song about the 1967 Detroit riot, "Black Day in July": "In the mansion of the governor/ There's nothing that is known for sure/. . . And they wonder how it happened/ And they really know the reason/ And it wasn't just the temperature/ And it wasn't just the season."[8]

The Commission operated in an enormously charged political arena, with a President who wanted answers that fit his assumptions, and

critics who assumed its report would be a whitewash. Chaired by Illinois Governor Otto Kerner, sometimes known as the Kerner Commission, its members were the Vice-Chair, New York Mayor John Lindsay; Oklahoma Senator Fred Harris; Massachusetts Senator Edward Brooke; California Congressman James Corman; Ohio Congressman William McCulloch; United Steelworkers of America President I. W. Abel; Litton Industries Founder and Chairman Charles B. "Tex" Thornton; NAACP Executive Director Roy Wilkins; Kentucky Commissioner of Commerce Katherine Graham Peden; and Atlanta Police Chief Herbert Jenkins. Kerner, Harris, and Corman were Democrats; McColloch, Brooke, and Lindsay, Republicans.[9] Most were moderate to liberal. Lindsay and Brooke (the first African American elected to the Senate since Reconstruction) were liberal Republicans. They existed back then.

The Kerner Commission Report surprised almost everyone and totally pleased very few. It concluded famously, "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal," and issued the first official acknowledgment that White racism engendered the conditions that bred Black discontent.[10]

From September-December 1967, I worked as a research assistant on the Kerner Commission staff. I treasure the hardbound copy of the report that each staff member received, our names embossed on the cover. My status may be hinted by the fact that my name is misspelled. I treasure it nonetheless.[11]

Four decades later, the 2008 historic context invited reflection on the legacies of those tumultuous years. It could be easy to succumb to self-indulgent nostalgia, and I am not certain I escaped that urge as I returned to the days between when the Commission was appointed and when it released its report, as I pondered what that history might offer to the contemporary discourse about race and the politics of memory.

The riots, the Report, and my reflections all require some context. The urban disorders of the 1960s were not the first race riots in U.S. history. African American history originated in violence, and Black resistance erupted periodically in urban confrontations, especially around wartimes, fueled by the contradiction between inequality at home as Black and Latinx soldiers fought for democratic rights abroad. Three hundred and fifty thousand African Americans served in segregated units during World War I, 42,000 of them in combat. In 1917, there were "race riots" in Philadelphia and Chester, Pennsylvania. Thirty-nine Blacks and nine Whites died when Whites rioted and destroyed 300 buildings in the Black

section of East St. Louis, Illinois. Two years later, thirty people died in a Chicago riot, and there were similar disorders in Omaha, Charleston, and Washington, D.C. The horrific Tulsa riot of 1921 killed over thirty people and destroyed a square mile of the Black section of Tulsa known as "the Black Wall Street."[12]

Again, during World War II, the races clashed in Mobile, Los Angeles, Beaumont, Harlem, St. Louis, Youngstown, Cicero, and Chicago. Federal troops were called out to put down the 1943 Detroit riot that killed twenty-five Blacks and nine Whites and destroyed over $200 million in property.[13]

World War II began to transform the urban social landscape that set the stage for the civil disorders of the 1960s, as African Americans moved north and west for jobs in wartime factories. An estimated 1.5 million left the South during the 1940s; another 1.1 million the following decade, seeking jobs and better opportunities. They found a North as residentially segregated as the South they left, and fewer good jobs than they had hoped. Many cities underwent an unsettling demographic shift: Black in-migration, White flight as large numbers of White European Americans fled racially diverse urban areas for more racially homogenous suburbs, thereby eroding urban tax bases.[14]

As James Gregory demonstrated in *The Southern Diaspora*, the migrations of Black and White southerners cannot be understood in isolation from one another. The separate but connected histories of White and Black southerners wove through my childhood. I grew up in Galveston, Texas, raised by civil rights advocates in the segregated South. The connected inequalities of race were as clear as the differences between my mother and the Black housekeepers who made it possible for her to practice medicine. I didn't know until I read Gregory that I left Galveston as part of a migration of 5.6 million Whites who left the South in the postwar decades. "In the 1950s and 1960s," he wrote, "as civil rights struggles dominated regional politics, new cohorts of southerners left the South for political reasons. Especially this was an option for young people, college-bound or recent graduates, both young African Americans and young Whites of liberal ideals, including quite a few among the region's small Jewish population."[15]

Including me. I left in June of 1965 to attend Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. Founded by abolitionists in 1853, Antioch was the second U.S. college to admit women and African Americans, and Yellow Springs was an underground railway stop for escaped slaves heading to Canada. Many Antioch students worked in the southern Civil Rights movement;

the brothers of two civil rights workers slain in 1963, David Goodman and Steve Schwerner, both attended Antioch. So did Coretta Scott King.

Idealism and naivete drew me North, where I thought I would find equality and brotherhood. That lasted three months. Antioch had a work-study program. For five years students alternated quarters studying on campus with work quarters at co-op jobs throughout the country. My first job, in the fall of 1965, was at the National Opinion Research Center in Chicago, on the edge of Woodlawn, an impoverished African American neighborhood.[16] If my fantasy of racial equality faded abruptly in Chicago, imagine the impact of northern realities on my African American counterparts. I carried that tension between hope and racial realities with me to Washington in the fall of 1967.

The Commissioners were already hard at work. From August through November, they held twenty days of closed hearings, interviewed 130 witnesses, and, in groups of two or three, visited eight of the riot areas, meeting with Black residents, militants, and public officials.[17]

The President appointed a trusted adviser, Washington attorney David Ginsburg, as executive director of the Commission. His deputy, Victor Palmieri, recruited over ninety consultants and professional staff—many detailed to the Commission from federal agencies—to document and analyze what caused the riots. The deputy assistant director for research was Dr. Robert Shellow, a social psychologist who was seconded from the National Institute of Mental Health. "A number of social scientists wouldn't touch the commission with a 10-foot pole," he later remembered. "They were concerned about their reputations. They thought the report would be something that would pervert social science."[18] Shellow regularly hired Antioch interns at NIMH, so he called the College for three student research assistants (at least that is what I was told at the time).[19] The core staff consisted of three young research associates, David Boesel, Louis Goldberg, and Gary Marx, and the three students, Jesse Epstein, Oliver "Lock" Holmes, and me. Derek Roemer and Elliot Liebow from NIMH helped with some of our case studies.[20]

Dr. Shellow believed that our "social science input" could shape the report's ideological basis; he encouraged his staff to let the evidence shape the analysis. With that promise, he attracted star consultants like Nathan Caplan and Jeffrey Paige of the University of Michigan, Ralph Turner of UCLA, and Neil Smelser from the University of California, Berkeley. Everyone was vetted for security: the White House rejected Herbert Gans for his anti-war activism.[21] Late one night Jesse Epstein and I decided to

read our security clearances and got a sobering lesson in what the FBI knew about our short political histories.

We were all swallowed up in the urgency of the research agenda, and the impending deadlines for an interim report by March 1, 1968, and a final report by August. Facing urgent timelines and an enormous task, the staff ranked disturbances in over 150 cities by the degree of violence and damage, the duration of the violence, the number of active participants, and the level of law enforcement response. A sample of twenty-three cities was selected from this list, including nine cities that had "serious disturbances," three with disorders in university settings, a chain of six New Jersey cities surrounding Newark, and five cities that experienced lesser degrees of violence.[22] For each city, staff collected and reviewed reports from the FBI, Department of Justice, and other government agencies, and newspaper accounts. Then, over several months, six-person investigative teams went to twenty cities—the three university towns got contracted out. The larger six-person teams divided themselves into pairs to interview people from the official sector, the private sector, and residents and leaders of community groups in the riot area; they interviewed more than 1,200 people in all. After interviewing in each area, they returned to Washington to dictate reports and to be debriefed by Commission staff. Their data were augmented by interviews with samples of Detroit and Newark residents, and socioeconomic profiles of all twenty-three cities. From these sources, the research staff prepared analyses of causal factors, collective behavior, leadership structures, and the bargaining processes during the disorders.[23]

I was assigned to assist David Boesel with what we called the "New Jersey string": Newark, Elizabeth, Englewood, Jersey City, New Brunswick, Paterson, and Plainfield.[24] I had worked during the winter quarter of 1967 as a student intern for Senator Clifford P. Case of New Jersey. Every morning for three months I clipped New Jersey newspapers—it turned out to be time well spent. I attended the debriefings with the interview teams and wrote chronologies of the "disturbances" in each city, noting participants' backgrounds, precipitating factors, grievances, duration of violence, official response, and the resolution and aftermath. As we digested the data, the research associates wrote preliminary analyses, city by city. Aiming for a draft analysis by late November, they churned out a thirty-page analysis of each riot every three days. Dr. Shellow brought in cots. At times we worked virtually around the clock, seven days a week.[25]

The office was under tight security. One Sunday, as Jesse, Lock, and I were typing away, dressed in grubby weekend clothes, a strange guy

wandered in. We told him that he had entered a secure area and offered to help him find his way out. "Perhaps I should introduce myself," he said. "My name is Otto Kerner." That is the only visit I remember from a member of the Commission, but Senator Harris and Representative Corman assigned staff to drop in and check on us.

The New Jersey string was included in the research sample to investigate how violence spread from Newark to the surrounding communities. Cambridge, Maryland, was included as well to examine possible outside influence. One of Executive Director David Ginsberg's top priorities, as he later put it, was "the idea that these riots were a result of a conspiracy, communist or otherwise. It was our objective first to determine whether it was true, and if it was false, to kill it."[26] The conspiracy theory had many powerful adherents, including the President.[27] The Commissioners addressed the conspiracy question on August 1, with FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. Hoover testified that he had no "intelligence" to indicate a conspiracy. "Outside agitators," he said, had played a role in the riots, though he had no evidence to link the riots in one city to those in another.[28]

And so, we turned to New Jersey. We found common links there: poverty, longstanding grievances with White-dominated local power structures, and a triggering incident, usually involving the police. After that it depended—on whether there were clearly articulated grievances and demands, on whether local Black leadership emerged, and on the official response. These differences were obscured by the official language of civil unrest. We were not supposed to use the word "riot," the forbidden four-letter word for all Commission discourse. The "civil disorders" ranged from Newark, which cost twenty-three lives and over $10 million in damage, to several very minor "outbreaks." Newark, Plainfield, and New Brunswick illustrate the range.

Newark had all the classic preconditions. Between 1960 and 1967, it lost 70,000 White residents, and went, in six years, from 65 percent White to 52 percent Black and 10 percent Latinx. Whites lived elsewhere, worked in Newark, and paid no taxes for city services. Property taxes rose, by 1967, to $661.70 for a $10,000 house; 74 percent of Whites and 87 percent of Blacks rented. Newark spent much less per capita on education than surrounding communities. Twenty thousand children went to overcrowded schools that operated on "double sessions," with two groups of students that each got only a half-day of school. Almost half the Blacks between ages sixteen and nineteen were not in school; most Black adults had less than a grade eight education.[29]

Whites held seven of nine seats on the City Council and Board of Education. Blacks were politically disillusioned by losing battles against converting over 150 acres in the Black Central Ward to a medical school and appointing a less-qualified White as Secretary of the Board of Education rather than the city's African American Budget Director, who had a master's degree in accounting. With a police force proportionately larger than any other major city, the crime rate was among the highest in the nation. There was longstanding antagonism between African Americans and the largely Italian American police force. Twelve percent of Blacks were unemployed, plus 20,000 teenagers with no jobs or summer recreation programs.[30]

On the evening of July 12, Newark police arrested a Black cabdriver named John Smith who they said was tailgating them and who was driving without a license. Smith, who either could not or would not walk, was dragged out of a police car into the Fourth Precinct Police Station in full view of a high-rise housing project. Rumors flew, a crowd gathered, as well as Black community leaders Oliver Loftus, Timothy Still, and Robert Curvin, and Inspector Kenneth Melchior, the senior police administrator on the night watch. Melchior sent the injured Smith to hospital; doctors found that he'd been beaten and suffered broken ribs. A line of police in front of the station "exchanged volleys of profanity" with Blacks across the street. Loftus persuaded the crowd to begin a march to City Hall, which disintegrated as youngsters began throwing rocks. A line of cabs drove to City Hall to protest, leading to rumors of an organized disturbance. The night passed with only minor property damage.[31]

The next day Black leaders met with Mayor Hugh Addonizio, who took the two officers who arrested Smith off active duty and agreed to promote a Black police lieutenant. That night picketers protested police brutality in front of the Fourth Precinct until a barrage of rocks and bottles shattered windows at the precinct and set off a wave of looting and vandalism.[32]

At 2:20 a.m. Mayor Addonizio asked Governor Richard Hughes for help, and Hughes activated the State Police and National Guard. By Saturday, July 15, the Guard and State Police patrolled a fourteen-mile perimeter that sealed the riot area. Looting and sniping resumed that night. Many residents testified that the National Guard, mostly young, scared, and inexperienced, deliberately shot into businesses that displayed "Soul Brother" signs, and targeted peaceful Black residents. The violence tapered off by Sunday, leaving twenty-three people dead, including a

White detective, a White firefighter and twenty-one Blacks, among them a 73-year-old man, six women, and two children.[33]

Newark was the classic "bad riot" in a major urban center with Black poverty and unemployment, little access to power, a growing core of militant leaders, a precipitating incident involving the police, high levels of violence, and one or more deaths.

Plainfield, a bedroom community next door, shared similar characteristics. A post-World War II influx raised the city's Black population to 30 percent, concentrated on the city's west side. The West End was impoverished, but not as depressed as Newark's Central Ward. Blacks had a median 7.9 years of education, Whites, 11.7. Only two city council members out of eleven were African American. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was so frustrated that it had tacked a list of complaints and demands on City Hall in February; none were acknowledged. There were widespread complaints of police brutality and racism.[34]

Plainfield's riot began July 14, when two Black youngsters got into a fight at a local teenage hangout. An off-duty police officer, recently accused of brutality, who was working as a private guard, refused to intervene and one youth was taken to hospital. The other teenagers gathered at a nearby housing project to protest. As the two Black city council members, Henry Judkins and Everett Lattimer, addressed them, about fifty angry youths split off to break windows in Plainfield's business district. The police turned them back.[35]

Shortly after midnight, Judkins, Lattimer, and a young Black news reporter, David Hardy, met with the group to discuss their grievances. They arranged a meeting with Mayor George Hetfield, scheduled for that afternoon at the Teen Center. Police heard that Black youths were making firebombs at a filling station, ran them off and found about a dozen badly made Molotov cocktails. The meeting with the mayor was postponed until 7–9 p.m., when Hetfield met with fifty to one hundred Black youths, Judkins, Lattimer, and Hardy. The young people voiced complaints about police behavior and about recreational facilities, including a long-standing demand for a swimming pool that had been promised the year before. Instead, the city was busing children to the county pool three days a week, and charging twenty-five cents, a considerable burden for poor families. The mayor was not impressed; the meeting disintegrated. Eight fires were set that night, none of which destroyed buildings. Quiet returned.[36]

On July 16, following some rock throwing, the mayor called in the State Police and National Guard. Two to three hundred Black youths

met on Plainfield Avenue. David Sullivan, the only Black member of the Plainfield Human Relations Commission, persuaded them to move to a local park. The orderly meeting elected ten representatives and was drawing up a list of grievances. Then the police broke it up because there was no permit to use the park.[37]

As looting and window-breaking resumed, the State Police sealed the area. That night, a White police officer, John Gleason, pursued a Black youth into the riot area and shot him, but not fatally. Angry Blacks stomped Gleason to death. Forty-six carbines were stolen from a local manufacturer and distributed in apparent preparation for police retaliation. The next day, July 17, State Community Relations Director Paul Ylsivaker and the Attorney General met with adult African American representatives. They agreed that the state police would maintain the perimeter and Blacks would patrol their own area. Ylsivaker and Hardy met with fifty youths at the Teen Center. The youths chose ten representatives to present their grievances to city officials. These included the promised swimming pool, police brutality, and housing and rental practices. The mayor, the two state officials, and the State Police Commander went to the African American neighborhood and addressed a crowd of three-to-four-hundred people. Later that night a deal was struck to release twelve people arrested during the riot if Black leaders would try to recover the carbines.[38]

Sporadic shots were fired during the night. On July 18, Black residents started cleaning the streets while the Department of Community Relations distributed food and milk in the riot area. On July 19, Officer Gleason was buried, and a State Police search found only three guns, none of them carbines. Cleanup continued July 20; the State Police and National Guard left.[39]

Considering Plainfield's population, about 50,000, its riot was among the most severe. The leadership nucleus appeared to be a small group of militant Black youths. Without realizing it, young people had been becoming a powerful political force. In the period leading up to the riot, there had been a growing conflict between Black race-consciousness and an inflexible White social and political power structure. That conflict included the youths' demands for the swimming pool. It had taken strikes and boycotts to achieve school integration, and then "tracking" students into separate academic cohorts kept Black students segregated from White students in separate "tracks." Black junior high students boycotted the cafeteria to protest discrimination. Finally, the youngsters opposed an

anti-loitering amendment the City Council was considering because they thought it was directed at them and would fuel police harassment.[40]

The research staff concluded that in Plainfield, "rebellion" was a better descriptive term than "riot" because there had been:

> . . . a well-documented set of political and racial problems in Plainfield to which the use of violence by young Blacks was a definite and connected response. There was a deliberate alternation in the response between the use of violence and steps to negotiate with city authorities. There were social developments within the ghetto from the precipitating incident to the terminal action which gave rise to a loosely structured Black leadership and to the establishment, partly by default, of physical control of the ghetto itself by armed youths. And there was the emergence of a high degree of racial-communal solidarity which continued after the riot and which provided the base for the development of new, politically conscious organizations.[41]

Grievances were quickly articulated, and the inclination to meet and talk rather than immediately starting to riot indicated an unusual degree of collective deliberation and rationality. The riot was a political event—not an anomic spasm in response to admittedly bad living conditions, but a response to the unequal distribution of social power.[42]

New Brunswick defined a different pattern and spectrum of violence. Ten miles from Plainfield, about the same size, a commercial center and home of Rutgers University, the population in 1960 was 16 percent Black with no discernible African American neighborhood. Black median income was 71 percent of Whites'; three Blacks in ten had a family income under $3,000; 30 percent owned homes.[43]

During the Plainfield rebellion, rumors flew that New Brunswick was "really going to blow."[44] Staff members of the local antipoverty agency met with the city council, and with Mayor Patricia Sheehan, who had been elected two months earlier on a reform platform. Sheehan appointed a Black community relations officer and sent Black plainclothes police to the streets to fight rumors. The police were told to act with restraint. The radio station decided to play down rumors and news of any disturbance. The antipoverty agency set up a multiracial task force to cool the situation. Then, the night of July 17, a group of youngsters began breaking windows.

The youths, including twelve- and thirteen-year-olds, chose their targets and looted an odd assortment of goods, including bubble gum and witch hazel. Tuesday morning the mayor invoked a curfew and recorded a radio appeal for order. The antipoverty agency, which had just received funding for its summer program, began hiring teenagers as recreational aides. So many applied that they cut the stipends in half and hired twice as many youths. The mayor and city commissioners met with thirty-five teenagers who "poured out their souls to the mayor" and agreed to draw up a statement attacking discrimination, inferior education and employment opportunities, police harassment, and poor housing. Four of the youths broadcast appeals on the radio urging their "soul brothers and sisters" to "cool it, because you will only get hurt and the mayor has talked with us and is going to do something for us."[45]

That evening there was a confrontation at a housing project between the police and a crowd angered by a large squad of police in riot dress. The mayor ordered the police to withdraw, then grabbed a bullhorn and addressed the crowd, asking for a chance to correct conditions. Finally, they decided: "She's new! Give her a chance!" The crowd demanded and got the right to inspect the jail to ensure that everyone arrested the night before had been released.[46]

The Commission report emphasized the proactive official acts, not the disorder. The youngsters had learned what Boesel called coercive protest. They targeted selected stores, issued their demand to meet with the mayor, and stopped the violence when they got a response.[47]

The events in Plainfield, New Brunswick, and the rest of the New Jersey string were clearly part of a "spillover effect" from Newark. Many African Americans had moved out of Newark but had family and friends in the Central Ward. The behaviors on all sides became increasingly stylized and deliberate as the disturbances progressed. The participants got younger, the lists of demands more clearly articulated, the official responses either more proactive, as in New Brunswick, or more repressive, as in Jersey City where the mayor promised to "meet force with force."[48]

We found no evidence of conspiracy or of outside agitators. Rather we found poor living conditions, real local grievances, inflammatory media reports, and ties of family and friendship that bound the African Americans of northern New Jersey.[49] David Boesel requested records of the northern New Jersey telephone activity beginning with the Newark riot. Finding huge increases in calls among Black neighborhoods, he concluded that riots spread by word of mouth among African Americans who were

literally and psychically brothers. In Cambridge, where Rap Brown did make a militant speech, the staff report concluded: "It may be emotionally satisfying to think that Brown came to Cambridge and that therefore a riot followed; it may be simpler for the public to grasp. But the facts are more complex and quite different."[50]

Those complex facts challenged key assumptions about who rioted and why. In Newark and Detroit, rioters were not immiserated southern migrants. The "typical" rioter in 1967 was an unmarried Black man between age 15 and 24, born and raised where the riot occurred. His economic situation did not differ markedly from his neighbors who did not riot. He was not likely to be a high school graduate but was better educated than most inner-city Blacks. If he had a job, it was menial, low status part-time work as an unskilled laborer, interrupted by frequent unemployment. He felt he deserved and was qualified for a better job but was barred by employer discrimination. He was proud to be Black and felt equal hostility toward most Whites and middle-class Blacks.[51] He was, in short, a slightly upwardly mobile person who found his aspirations blocked by institutionalized racism and who interpreted his situation through the lens of Black activism.

Nothing that we learned could predict riots. Correlation is not causality. The same underlying conditions existed in cities that did not riot, the same daily brutality, the same reservoir of Black anger and frustrated hopes.

The research team began in November to write its preliminary report, "The Harvest of American Racism," using the case studies to analyze riot processes, and the political, economic, and educational structures that maintained Black inequality. Written during the last two weeks of November, before the city analyses were completed, it was a 176-page preliminary draft, written in the belief that there would be time to revise and expand until June. Most of it never made it into the Commission's Report.[52] I've used parts of it here, especially in the section on Plainfield, working partly from memory, and partly from later publications by Boesel, Goldberg, and Marx.[53] I first read their 1971 article on Plainfield in 2008, as I wrote my lecture, and discovered that they had given me my first published acknowledgement for scholarship, for my Plainfield riot chronology.

"Harvest" was hardly a polished document or one that a government agency was likely to embrace. None of us fully understood that the senior staff expected us to support the President's political agenda based in

the causal importance of "ignorance, discrimination, slums, poverty, disease, not enough jobs." "Harvest" combined liberal assumptions that the President embraced with analyses of structural racism and African American responses that he would reject, especially in the final section, "America on the Brink: White Racism and Black Rebellion." The Kerner Report diverged from "The Harvest of American Racism" in its analysis of White racism, which The Kerner Report treated as an individual attitude, whereas "Harvest" pointed to an analysis of the institutions that reinforced racism and the systems of power that maintained Black subordination. As Gary Marx observed regarding the characterization of racism as individual prejudice, "Because it accuses everyone, it accuses no one."[54]

Palmieri and Ginsberg were appalled. "Harvest" was no more poorly done than much of the final report, but it challenged too many assumptions and was not what they wanted from the "social science input." Palmieri fired Shellow and excluded him from then on.[55]

Ginsburg had apparently long since decided to issue the final report March 1. He told the Commission on December 8 that there would be no interim report, and then 120 investigators and social scientists were "released," purportedly because it was time for a small team to write the final document. Palmieri turned "Harvest" over to Deputy Director Stephen Kurzman, who used some of our work minus the more difficult analyses.[56]

In the wake of these disillusioning events, some of the commissioners threw a party for the departing staff. Amidst a lot of smoke and alcohol, Senator Harris cornered some of us and said, "I hear there's a report we're not seeing." Someone—either Harris or a Congressional staffer—said, "You know, I'd be surprised in the current circumstances if some researchers weren't xeroxing a lot late at night." Harris somehow got his copy of "Harvest," and Boesel, Marx, and Goldberg preserved enough to publish from our drafts and data.

Within the Commission, there was a struggle over content. Lindsay, Harris, and Roy Wilkins insisted that the report could not ignore racism. But the "White racism" for which the report is noted is mentioned only briefly in the summary. The causal analysis rested on individual race prejudice, the formation of racial ghettos and their living conditions, unemployment, family structure, and social disorganization. The Report proposed policies to handle disorders, hire Black journalists, and adopt a national agenda to increase opportunities in jobs, housing, and education and "remove the frustration of powerlessness."[57]

The Report opened to mixed reviews March 1, 1968.[58] President Johnson faced an election year as his domestic War on Poverty was threatened by the mounting costs of Vietnam. He was angry with Dr. King, who blamed the War for eviscerating the Poverty programs and for sending Black soldiers "to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in southwest Georgia and East Harlem."[59] Johnson did not, as was common, invite the Commission to the White House for the unveiling.[60] Then, on March 31, he announced that he would neither seek nor accept nomination for another term. Four days later, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated in Memphis, and the cities exploded yet again. Gordon Lightfoot released "Black Day in July" that April. It was immediately banned by U.S. top-40 radio stations, for fear, they said, that Lightfoot's lyrics might incite racial violence.[61] So much for causal analysis.

The Report became a runaway best seller. Over two million copies were sold.[62] Most big city mayors embraced its findings. Future President Richard Nixon, campaigning for the Republican presidential nomination, said the report "blames everybody for the riots except the perpetrators," and put "undue emphasis on the idea that we are in effect a racist society, White racists versus Black racists."[63]

Forty years later, when I gave my lecture, what had changed? What might this small chapter add to the long history of race in America? The riots of the mid-1960s differed from earlier riots, which had been direct clashes between Blacks and Whites, not between African Americans and the police or the military. They were different from the southern Civil Rights Movement but not separate, as Dr. King and other leaders turned their attention after 1965 from legal change to poverty and structural racism. Though they took the focus off the segregated South, they were not confined to northern cities; our sample of twenty-three riots included Atlanta, Houston, Tampa, and Jackson, Mississippi. Urban grievances did not lend themselves to immediate legal solutions, and they could not rely on the well-developed leadership that the southern Black church had provided. The riots gave leadership training, in fact, to some young African Americans born just before the Supreme Court ordered school integration in 1954, just before Emmett Till was murdered and Rosa Parks began the Montgomery bus boycott the following year, who came of age with rising expectations that were not fulfilled in their daily lives.[64]

For African Americans, there have been mixed responses to the conditions the Kerner Commission targeted. The two surviving Commissioners in 2008, former Senators Fred Harris and Edward Brooke, both emphasized

the unfinished agenda. Fred Harris quit the Senate and in 1976 joined the Political Science department at the University of New Mexico. In March 2008 he told an Albuquerque journalist, "A lot of people think we solved all that, but we didn't. We did a lot of things back then that worked, but we aren't doing those things now. We have 37 million people living in poverty today. We have 47 million people without health insurance. And it's shameful that America ranks 22nd in the world in infant mortality"[65] Edward Brooke wrote in the *Washington Post* April 3, 2008, that "despite the visibility of accomplished African Americans and Hispanics and the progress in race relations that ha[d] been made" in the past forty years:

> for America's poor—those who don't know what health care is, because for them it doesn't exist, those for whom prison is a more likely prospect than college, those who have been abandoned in the worst of decaying, crime-ridden urban centers because of the flight of middle-class Blacks, Whites and Hispanics—the future may be as bleak as it was for their counterparts in the 1960s.[66]

Harris and Brooke based their sober assessments on the February 2008 report of the Eisenhower Foundation, which they had helped found and which periodically assesses the progress toward the Kerner Commission's policy objectives of reducing poverty, inequality, racial injustice, and crime. In 2008, the mutually reinforcing inequalities of race, class, and gender still characterized the experiences of most African Americans. The Eisenhower Foundation found, for instance, that the 2006 poverty rate was almost 44 percent in households headed by African Americans women with children under age eighteen. Black unemployment had been consistently twice as high as White unemployment from 1968 to 2008. The class divide had widened; over those forty years the U.S. experienced the most rapid growth in wage inequality in the industrial world. Among full-time workers, Whites earned over 22 percent more than equivalent Black workers and almost 34 percent more than Latinx workers. Residential segregation remained high and was highest for Blacks. African American men aged twenty-five to twenty-nine were seven times more likely to be imprisoned than their White counterparts.[67]

All the cities in the New Jersey string were proportionately more African American and more Latinx in 2000 than in 1967, but there were significant class differences between those who lived in Newark and the

smaller suburban cities. Plainfield, by 2000, was 64 percent Black and a quarter Latinx; three-fourths of the population had at least a high school education. Its poverty was less than the national average: 12 percent of all families, and 20 percent of female-headed households lived below the poverty line.[68] In Newark, half the population hadn't finished high school, and twice as many families were impoverished: 25 percent overall, and 40 percent of female-headed households.[69] New Brunswick fell somewhere in between: a quarter Black, 40 percent Latinx; 36 percent had not graduated high school; 17 percent of all families and 29 percent of female-headed households fell below the poverty line.[70]

There is no evidence that these differences were related to the riots of 1967. The striking changes included the growth of an African American middle class, the increase in Black elected officials, including big city mayors like Kenneth Gibson of Newark, elected shortly after the riot, and Cory Booker, the mayor in 2008, who was born in 1969. Booker was elected to the U.S. Senate in 2012, following Obama's historic election as the first African American U.S. President in 2008.

It was easy in 2008 to see similarities to 1967 in the racial class divide and an increasingly unpopular war in which people of color again fought and died in disproportionate numbers. Yet among the striking differences was this: no one was rioting in protest. No one rioted at the Super Dome in New Orleans which housed so many people of color during Hurricane Katrina in 2005, though the connections of race and poverty and inability to flee the hurricane could not have been starker. The few major riots since the early 1970s were ignited, as in 1967, by police brutality.[71] I can only speculate about why this was.

The residents of riot areas lived with the ruins for years, while White America and the Black middle class moved on, taking their rising expectations with them. Middle-class African Americans, of course, continued to experience racism. Like many other White Americans who did not directly experience the violence, I could choose when and how to engage with racist realities. The spring of 1968 brought the assassinations of Reverend King on April 4, 1968, and Senator Robert Kennedy on June 6. Fearing another summer of violence, I took my savings from the Kerner Commission to hitchhike and hostel through Europe with a friend, which is how I came to be picking peaches in an international work camp in Hungary as the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia.[72]

I lived with these memories in early 2008, in the midst of the furor over the Rev. Wright's comments and Senator Obama's eloquent March 18

speech on race in America. Obama characterized his differences with Rev. Wright as generational; he described Wright as one of the generations who came of age in the late 1950s and early 1960s, "when segregation was the law of the land and opportunity was systematically constricted. What's remarkable is not how many failed in the face of discrimination, but rather how many men and women overcame the odds; how many were able to make a way out of no way for those like me who would come after them." Those who did not make it, Obama said, passed on a "legacy of defeat."[73]

That legacy underscores differences of class as well as generations. Of all the candidates for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination, John Edwards most clearly addressed the enduring poverty of working-class Blacks. Both he and Rev. Wright took criticism from the media for being angry. The discomfort with their anger reminded me of Carolyn Heilbrun's observation in *Writing a Woman's Life*, that women's stories are limited by forbidden emotions, particularly "anger, together with the open admission of the desire for power and control over one's life."[74] Part of the legacy of Rev. Wright's generation, including, I suspect, the youngsters in New Brunswick and Plainfield, was the change they made in themselves by voicing anger, and by articulating the desire for power and control over their lives. The 1967 riots illuminated that anger, and the high cost of repressing it, of hopes deferred. They illuminated, too, the audaciously enduring hope, planted sometimes in anger in infertile soil, for power and control. Hope fueled the anger that erupted so tragically in the summer of 1967, and hope remains, against huge odds, part of the complex harvest of American racism.

NOTES

I am grateful to Amy McKinney for her unfailingly meticulous research assistance, and to then-Dean Kevin Quillan and the University of Calgary Institute for U.S. Policy Research (now sadly defunct) and its Director Stephen Randall for sponsoring the 2008 Chair's Lecture.

Additional Sources: The Report itself has been reprinted several times with introductions by respected scholars. See United States National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *The Kerner report / the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, with an introduction by Julian E. Zelizer (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016); Jelani Cobb and Matthew Guariglia, eds., *The Essential Kerner Commission Report* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2021) is a condensed version of the report with annotations and an introduction by Jelani Cobb. Cobb argues that the Report was prescient in its examination of race, economic inequality, and policing.

In 2018 the Russell Sage Foundation devoted an issue of its journal to the 50th anniversary of the Kerner Commission report. The issue contains ten articles that provide critiques of the report and assess the state of African Americans and race relations in the intervening fifty years. The articles that focus on the Kerner Commission Report itself include Susan T. Gooden and Samuel L. Myers Jr., "The Kerner Commission Report Fifty Years Later: Revisiting the American Dream," *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 4:6 (September 2018): 1–17; Keisha L. Bentley-Edwards, Malik Chaka Edwards, Cynthia Neal Spence, William A. Darity Jr., Darrick Hamilton, and Jasson Perez, "How Does It Feel to Be a Problem? The Missing Kerner Commission Report," 20–40; Matthew W. Hughey, "Whither Whiteness? The Racial Logics of the Kerner Report and Modern White Space," 73–98; and Rick Loessberg and John Koskinen, "Measuring the Distance: The Legacy of the Kerner Report," 99–119. The remaining articles examine changes in policing civil disorders, the status of African American students in higher education since 1968, changes in Black neighborhoods, in distribution of wealth, etc.

The most important addition to the literature on the Kerner Commission was the 2018 publication of the long-buried report of the Commission research staff, discovered in an archive at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas, Austin, with the word "Destroy" stamped on the cover page. Robert Shellow, ed., *The Harvest of American Racism: The Political Meaning of Violence in the Summer of 1967* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018) contains the original suppressed report, a foreword by Michael C. Dawson, the introduction by Robert Shellow, recollections of the history and development of the Harvest Report by Robert Shellow, David Boesel, Gary T. Marx, and David O. Sears, and two appendices: "Appendix A: A Calendar of Disturbances in 1967, Showing Intensity and Duration," 149–56, and "Appendix B: Paul F. Lazersfeld and Martin Jaeckel, "The Commission's Report in Two Guises: The Role of Politics," 157–63. The essays by David Boesel and Gary Marx also describe their efforts after the staff was fired to continue publishing analyses of the riots. The volume is a valuable addition to the history of the Kerner Commission and of political responses to racism in the 1960s.

1 "A More Perfect Union," speech delivered by Senator Barack Obama in Philadelphia, March 18, 2008. The full text of Senator Obama's historic speech is widely available on the internet. I accessed the transcript from *The Wall Street Journal*, March 18, 2008.

2 The three candidates were New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson, Senator Obama, and Senator Hillary Clinton. After reports of Rev. Wright's angry rhetoric created problems for the Obama campaign, Senator Obama responded with his "A More Perfect Union" speech about race in America. Then, following televised appearances in which Rev. Wright suggested that the U.S. had been attacked on 9/11 because it had engaged in terrorism abroad and that the U.S. government was culpable for the AIDS epidemic, on April 30 Senator Obama announced his resignation from Rev. Wright's church. See Barack Obama, *A Promised Land* (New York: Crown, 2020), 140–48.

3 For examples of the numerous reflections on the anniversaries of the Kerner Commission Report and of Dr. King's assassination, see R. B. Jones, "Forty Years after the Kerner Commission Report," *Baltimore Times*, March 7, 2008; Jim Belshaw, "Eyes Still on the Prize That's Out of Reach," *Albuquerque Journal*, March 28, 2008 and (former Senator) Edward F. Brooke, "King and Kerner: An Unfinished Agenda," *Washington Post*, April 3, 2008. Thanks to Kevin Quillan for the Edward Brooke article.

4 The use of "ghetto" is problematic today, when African American neighborhood would be a preferred terminology. I use "ghetto" only as the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders did in its official documents, and when it accurately reflected the ways African Americans described their living conditions in racially segregated and impoverished neighborhoods.

5 For a summary of riots from 1963 through the summer of 1967, see Chapter 1, "Profiles of Disorder," *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968), 19–61 (hereinafter *Kerner Report*). For excerpts of President Johnson's July 27, 1967 address, *see Kerner Report*, 297–98.

6 Executive Order 11365, Establishing a National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, July 9, 1967, *Kerner Report*, Appendix A, 295–96, Remarks of the President upon Issuing an Executive Order Establishing a National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, July 29, 1967, *Kerner Report*, Appendix B, 296–97.

7 Lyndon Baines Johnson, Address to the Nation, July 27, 1967; excerpts from the *Kerner Report*, Appendix C, 297, and quotes as Epigraph to the *Kerner Report*.

8 Gordon Lightfoot, "Black Day in July," Warner Brothers, Inc. For contemporary coverage of the Detroit riot, see for instance "Detroit is Swept by Rioting and Fires; Romney Calls in Guard; 700 Arrested," *New York Times*, July 25, 1967; Jerry M. Flint, "Detroit Negroes Call Police Slow," *New York Times*, July 25, 1967; M.S. Handler, "Detroit Riots Reported Curbed after Tanks Battle Day Snipers; 4 Negro Leaders Call for Order," *New York Times*, July 27, 1967; "Troops Battle Detroit Snipers, Firing Machine Guns from Tanks; Lindsay Appeals to East Harlem," *New York Times*, July 26, 1967; "Detroit Police Chief Finds No Riot Conspiracy," *New York Times*, July 28, 1967; "Bystanders of the Detroit Riot Line Up for Food where Stores Lie in Ruins," *Washington Post*, July 27, 1967.

9 See Appendix D, "Biographical Material on Commission," *Kerner Report*, 298–99.

10 See *Kerner Report*, especially the summary, which announced on page 1, "This is our basic conclusion: Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal."

11 It is spelled "Elizabeth Jamison" on the cover.

12 See *Kerner Report*, Chapter 5, "Rejection and Protest: An Historical Sketch," 95–113, esp. 101–2; Fred R. Harris and Roger W. Wilkins, eds., "*Quiet Riots*" (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 5–15, esp. 6–7; Richard C. Wade, "The Riots in History," in *Cities Under Siege: An Anatomy of the Ghetto Riots, 1064–1968*, eds. David Boesel and Peter H. Rossi (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1971), 277–96, esp. 287–89. For police behavior during the riots in historical perspective, see Gary T. Marx, "Civil Disorder and the Agents of Social Control," in Boesel and Rossi, *Cities Under Siege*, 157–84, esp. 158–66.

13 *Kerner Report*, 103–4; Wade, "Riots in History," esp. 289–90; Harris, "The 1967 Riots," 7.

14 James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 13–15, 82–86, 95–98; *Kerner Report*, Chapter 6, "The Formation of Racial Ghettos," 115–21.

15 Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora,* 36.

16 The National Opinion Research Center and University of Chicago are in the Hyde Park neighborhood where the Obama family later lived; President Obama had taught Constitutional Law at the University.

17 *Kerner Report*, 16; for a list of witnesses who testified before the Commission, 300–302.

18 Andrew Kopkind, "White on Black: The Riot Commission and the Rhetoric of Reform," in Boesel and Rossi, *Cities Under Siege*, 226–59, 232–36.

19 Dorothy Scott, the Co-op Advisor who placed me in my job at the Kerner Commission, told me that this was why Dr. Shellow asked the college to send him three research assistants.

20 See Kopkind, "White on Black," 239, 245–46. The account here of the staff and its work in the office of the Deputy Assistant Director for Research draws as well from my personal memories. Ten years after my 2008 lecture, Dr. Shellow remembered staff hirings

differently in his "Recollections—Robert Shellow," in *The Harvest of American Racism: The Political Meaning of Violence in the Summer of 1967*, ed. Robert Shellow (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018), 115.

> In short order I began to meet and interview candidates for the team, mostly young social scientists referred by their doctoral professor or senior faculty colleagues. The other members no doubt know better than I the reasons behind these referrals, but I suspect that several of the leading scientists who had avoided the spot I was in nonetheless wanted to have one of their own close to the action. In any case, I was particularly grateful to whoever it was that suggested three Antioch college co-op students, seniors Elizabeth "Betsy" Jameson, Oliver "Lock" Holmes, and Jesse Epstein, who provided invaluable support to their elder team members. We eagerly sought their opinions, and their energy and enthusiasm was unbounded.

I don't know whether Dr. Shellow's memory or mine is the more accurate, nor does it matter greatly. It's a useful reminder that minor details may be mis-reported in retrospect, including one in Dr. Shellow's account. None of us were seniors. Jesse and I were third-year students; Lock was in his fourth year of Antioch's five-year undergraduate program. Such details aside, I was moved by Dr. Shellow's words.

21 Kopkind, "White on Black," 237.

22 The twenty-three "civil disorders" selected for the research sample were: Atlanta, Georgia (June 17–21); Bridgeton, New Jersey (July 18–23); Cambridge, Maryland (June 24–27); Cincinnati, Ohio (June 12–17); Dayton, Ohio (June 14–18); Dayton, Ohio (September 19–20); Detroit, Michigan (July 23–28); Elizabeth, New Jersey (July 17–20); Englewood, New Jersey (July 17–20); Grand Rapids, Michigan (July 24–27); Houston, Texas (May 16–27); Jackson, Mississippi (May 10–12); Jersey City, New Jersey (July 17–19); Milwaukee, Wisconsin (July 30–August 6); Nashville, Tennessee (April 8–11); New Brunswick, New Jersey (July 17–18); New Haven, Connecticut (August 19–24); Newark, New Jersey (July 12–17); Paterson, New Jersey (July 15–20); Plainfield, New Jersey (July 14–19); Rockford, Illinois (July 28–31); Tampa, Florida (June 11–15); Tucson, Arizona (July 23–25). For graphic representations of the levels of violence in each city, see *Kerner Report*, "Charts on Levels of Violence and Negotiations," 359–407.

23 *Kerner Report*, 16, 61; Appendix K, "A Statement on Methodology," 319–22.

24 The chronology of these disorders was Newark (July 12–17); Plainfield (July 14–19); Paterson (July 15–20); New Brunswick (July 17–18); Jersey City (July 17–19); Elizabeth (July 17–20); Englewood (July 17–20). Although Bridgeton also experienced a disorder, July 17–23, it was excluded from the New Jersey "string" because it was located outside the Newark metropolitan area.

25 See Kopkind, "White on Black," 247–48.

26 Kopkind, "White on Black," 231.

27 Former Senator Fred Harris, a member of the Kerner Commission, wrote: "President Johnson, like a lot of people at that time, thought that there had been some kind of conspiracy behind the disorders; he told me so himself." Harris, "The 1967 Riots," 12.

28 Roy Reed, "Hoover Discerns No Plot in Riots," *New York Times*, August 2, 1967; Roy Reed, "Riot 'Agitators' Cited by Hoover: But Outsiders Played Minor Role, He Told U.S. Panel," *New York Times*, August 3, 1967.

29 *Kerner Report*, 30–31. For another official analysis of the Newark riot, see The New Jersey Governor's Select Commission on Civil Disorders, 'The Newark Riot," in Boesel and Rossi, *Cities Under Siege*, 22–66.

30 *Kerner Report*, 30–32.

31 *Kerner Report*, 32–34.

32 *Kerner Report*, 34.

33 *Kerner Report*, 35–38.

34 For the *Kerner Report* summary of the Plainfield riot, *Kerner Report*, 41–47, 75–77. As I wrote this portion of my 2008 lecture, I discovered David Boesel, Louis Goldberg, and Gary Marx, "Rebellion in Plainfield," in Boesel and Rossi, 67–83, on which I base this description. The authors graciously acknowledged me "for preparing an earlier version of the chronology; the basis of the present one." Boesel, Goldberg, and Marx, "Rebellion in Plainfield," 67.

35 Boesel, Goldberg, and Marx, "Rebellion in Plainfield," 67–68.

36 Boesel, Goldberg, and Marx, "Rebellion in Plainfield," 68–69.

37 Boesel, Goldberg, and Marx, "Rebellion in Plainfield," 69.

38 Boesel, Goldberg, and Marx, "Rebellion in Plainfield," 69–71.

39 Boesel, Goldberg, and Marx, "Rebellion in Plainfield," 71.

40 Boesel, Goldberg, and Marx, "Rebellion in Plainfield," 75–77.

41 Boesel, Goldberg, and Marx, "Rebellion in Plainfield," 77–78.

42 Boesel, Goldberg, and Marx, "Rebellion in Plainfield," 78. See also David Boesel, "An Analysis of the Ghetto Riots," in Boesel and Rossi, *Cities Under Siege*, 338.

43 *Kerner Report*, 354.

44 *Kerner Report*, 46. This summary of the New Brunswick riot is based on the *Kerner Report*, 46–47, and on my memory.

45 *Kerner Report*, 46.

46 *Kerner Report*, 46–47.

47 Boesel, "Analysis of the Ghetto Riots," 335.

48 *Kerner Report*, 39.

49 For the official conclusions regarding conspiracy and the causes of the 1967 riots, see Kerner Report, 89, 91–93. The Kerner Commission would ultimately conclude that "the urban disorders of the summer of 1967 were not caused by, nor were they the consequence of, any organized plan or 'conspiracy.' Specifically, the Commission has found no evidence that all or any of the disorders or the incidents that led to them were planned or directed by any organization or group—international, national, or local." *Kerner Report*, 89.

50 The quote is from the unpublished report prepared by our staff. See Gail Bensinger and Maurice McLaughlin, "Report Says Rap Brown Didn't Cause Md. Riot," *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, March 5, 1968. See also David Boesel and Louis Goldberg, with a chronology by Jesse Epstein, "Crisis in Cambridge," in Boesel and Rossi, *Cities Under Siege*, 110–29; Louis C. Goldberg, "Ghetto Riots and Others: The Faces of Civil Disorders in 1967," in Boesel and Rossi, *Cities Under Siege*, 149–51. For contemporary coverage of Brown and the Cambridge riot, see Ben A. Franklin, "S.N.C.C. Chief Shot In Cambridge, Md.," *New York Times*, July 25, 1967; Ben A. Franklin, "Leader of S.N.C.C. Seized in Virginia," *New York Times*, July 17, 1967; Leon Dash, "Cambridge Riot Beautiful, Brown Says," *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, July 27, 1967.

51 See *Kerner Report*, 73–77; Dr. Robert M. Fogelson and Dr. Robert B. Hill, "Who Riots? A Study of Participation in the 1967 Riots," in *Supplemental Studies: The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968), 217–43, esp. 233–40; Nathan Caplan, "The New Ghetto Man: A Review of Recent Empirical Studies," in Boesel and Rossi, *Cities Under Siege*, 343–59; and Clark McPhail, "Civil Disorder Participants: A Critical Examination of Recent Research," *American Sociological Review* 36:6 (December 1971): 1058–73.

52 Personal memory and Kopkind, "White on Black," 247–48.

53 Boesel and Rossi, eds., *Cities Under Siege*; Boesel, Goldberg and Marx, "Rebellion in Plainfield"; Boesel, "Analysis of the Ghetto Riots"; Boesel and Goldberg with Epstein, "Crisis in Cambridge"; Goldberg, "Ghetto Riots and Others"; Gary T. Marx, "Civil Disorders and Agents of Social Control," in Boesel and Rossi, *Cities Under Siege*, 157–84; David Boesel, Richard Berk, W. Eugene Groves, Bettye K. Edison, and Peter H. Rossi, "White Institutions and Black Rage," in Boesel and Rossi, *Cities Under Siege*, 309–24; Gary T. Marx, *Racial Conflict: Tension and Change in American Society* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971); Gary T. Marx, "Issueless Riots," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 391 (September 1970): 21–33.

54 Kopkind, "White on Black," 248; Gary Marx, quoted in Kopkind, "White on Black," 256.

55 Although Palmieri "fired" Dr. Shellow immediately, the actual separation process was drawn out over some months and appeared more ambiguous at the time. Kopkind, "White on Black," 249, and personal memory.

56 Kopkind, "White on Black," 252. Most staff in our office suspected at the time that the 120 staff were "let go" in reaction to our report, and we feared a cover up. For a personal "inside chronicle" of the tumultuous events of late November and early December 1967, see a letter that Lou Goldberg wrote to Commission Vice-Chair John Lindsay, but never sent, in Kopkind, "White on Black," 249–51.

57 Kopkind, "White on Black," 252–56.

58 Kerner had anticipated some negative response in advance, and press reports that anticipated the Commission findings foreshadowed the mixed responses. See Robert B. Semple, Jr., "Kerner Says U.S. Riots Report May Appear Abrasive to Some," *New York Times*, January 11, 1968; John Hebers, "Riot Study Is Said to Express Alarm," *New York Times*, February 18, 1968. For coverage of the *Kerner Report* when it was released, see "Panel on Civil Disorders Calls for Drastic Action to Avoid 2-Society Nation," *New York Times*, March 1, 1968; John Hebers, "Riot Panel Fears U.S. May Develop 'Urban Apartheid,'" *New York Times*, March 3, 1968; "Negroes and Rights: New Controversy in Wake of Kerner Report," *New York Times*, March 10, 1968.

59 Martin Luther King, Jr., "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence," a speech to Clergy and Laymen Concerned about Vietnam," Riverside Church, New York City, April 4, 1967.

60 Because the Kerner Commission Report essentially confirmed President Johnson's own analysis of the riots, there is considerable speculation about why he distanced himself from the report and snubbed the Commission when it was released. Senator Harris believed that Johnson was erroneously informed that the report would criticize his civil rights policies and his War on Poverty. Others thought that the political agenda had shifted to the Vietnam War, and Dr. King's anti-war activism only highlighted the widening break between the President and African American leaders. See Brooke, "King and Kerner" and Harris, "The Riots and the Commission," 12–13.

61 See "Lightfoot banned in the U.S.A.," CBC radio broadcast, Reporter Alan Milar, interview with Gordon Lightfoot, CBC Digital Archives, http://archives.cbc.ca, accessed April 7, 2008.

62 Bantam Books sold 740,000 copies of a 708-page paperback version of the Report within the first eleven days. See Henry Raymont, "Riot Report Book Big Best Seller," *New York Times*, March 14, 2008; Stephan Thernstrom, Fred Siegel and Robert Woodson, Sr., "The Kerner Commission Report and the Failed Legacy of Liberal Social Policy," Heritage Lecture #619, The Heritage Foundation, March 13, 1998, http://www.heritage.org/Research/PoliticalPhilosphy/hl619.cfm.

63 "Negroes and Rights: New Controversy in the Wake of the Kerner Report," *New York Times*, March 10, 1968. Nixon's Democratic rival for the presidency in 1968, Vice-President Hubert Humphrey, was also cool on the report. *New York Times*, March 10,

1968. Carl Bernstein, "After Criticizing Riot Report, HHH Writes Laudatory Letters," *The Washington Post/Times Herald*, March 27, 1968; John Herbers, "The Kerner Report: A Journalist's View," in Harris and Wilkins, *Quiet Riots*, 21.

64 For an analysis of the riots as part of a continuous Black revolt, see Boesel, "An Analysis of the Ghetto Riots." As I prepare this essay for publication over half a century since the *Kerner Report* was published, and since the development of the Black Lives Matter movement, Boesel's analysis seems even more insightful.

65 Belshaw, "Eyes Still on the Prize That's Out of Reach."

66 Brooke, "King and Kerner: An Unfinished Agenda."

67 The Eisenhower Foundation is "the private sector continuation of the Kerner Riot Commission (and the National Violence Commission)." It periodically updated the Kerner Commission. In February 2008 the Foundation released a forty-year update on the Kerner Commission. I consulted the Executive Summary of the Foundation's preliminary findings, http://www.eisenhowerfoundation.org/kerner.php. The report was subsequently published. See The Eisenhower Foundation, *What Together We Can Do: A Forty Year Update on the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders Preliminary Findings* (Washington, D.C.: The Eisenhower Foundation, 2008). The twenty-five-year update, "In Commemoration of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders," is available at the organization's website, first accessed March 28, 2008. A return visit to the site in April 2021 did not show any subsequent updates, though the organization continues to publish on race, inequality, poverty, and violence and to advocate for public policy.

68 U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Table DP-1, Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000, Geographic area, Plainfield city, New Jersey; Profile of Selected Social Characteristics; 2000, Geographic area, Plainfield city, New Jersey; Table DP-3, Profile of Selected Economic Characteristics: 2000, Geographic area, Plainfield city, New Jersey. For racial compositions of the rest of the New Jersey "string," see U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Table DP-1, Profile of General Demographic Characteristics, 2000, Geographic areas, Elizabeth city, New Jersey; Jersey City, New Jersey; Englewood city, New Jersey; Paterson City, New Jersey.

69 U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Table DP-1, Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000, Geographic area, Newark city, New Jersey; Table DP-2, Profile of Selected Social Characteristics: 2000, Geographic area, Newark city, New Jersey; Table DP-3, Profile of Selected Economic Characteristics: 2000, Geographic area, Newark city, New Jersey.

70 U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Table DP-1, Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000, Geographic area, New Brunswick city, New Jersey; Table DP-2, Profile of Selected Social Characteristics: 2000, Geographic area, New Brunswick city, New Jersey; Table DP-3, Profile of Selected Economic Characteristics: 2000, Geographic area, New Brunswick city, New Jersey.

71 The period of few riots did not last long after 2008; as before, many confrontations were sparked by police actions.

72 The year 1968 was a time of enormous upheaval in many parts of the world. It marked a turn from Civil Rights to Black Power in the United States, increased mobilization against the Vietnam War following the Tet Offensive, student uprisings in France and Germany, and the violence at the 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago. I learned about the events in Chicago only after I left Hungary, where news from the West was not available following the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.

73 Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

74 Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), 25.