

Minutes of Meeting
with
Members of the
Kerner Commission on Civil Disorders

August 21, 1967

The meeting began at 2:30, Monday, August 21, 1967 in the Normandy Room of the Sheraton Cadillac Hotel. Mr. Mallett introduced the guests and Commissioners. Guests from Detroit were:

Mrs. Wynona Howard	GROW (Grass Roots Workers Organization)
Mr. Donald Bagley	GROW
Mr. David Cason	Merrill Palmer Institute
Mr. Charles Colding	
Mr. Reginald Wilson	DESACE
Mr. Conrad L. Mallett	Assistant to the Mayor

Commissioners present were:

Mr. Herbert Jenkins	Chief of Police, Atlanta
Mr. William McCullach	Congressman (Rep., O.)
Mr. James C. Corman	Congressman (Dem., Cal.)
Mr. David Chambers	Commission Staff

Mr. Mallett explained the Commissioners had spent the morning touring the areas affected by the riot. They had seen 12th Street, Grand River, Charlevoix and Kercheval. They had lunch with Commissioner Girardin. Mr. Mallett asked for their comments.

Congressman McCullach stated that although he was impressed by the pockets of large physical damage, destruction was not as extensive as he had thought. The Commissioners spoke with many people and are gathering first-hand information.

Mrs. Howard gave a brief description of the problems in Detroit as she sees them. She said that our problems began before she was born. They are not new problems or any that have developed within the last few years. The young people don't want to wait for their opportunity as her generation did.

Corman: Can the riots make things better for the young people?

Howard: We want better opportunity. The riot was saying the same thing we had been saying around the table and that we are saying here. We have dealt with the symptoms, but we have not begun to deal with the causes.

McCullach: What are the causes?

Corman: Is it planned?

Colding: No, there are people who are ready to move in if something happened but who could plan a blind pig raid?

In answer to the question, "What are the causes?," generally it is the ghetto. We must attack what makes ghettos. You ask, "Can good come out of the riots?" That depends on what you do. You must take the shackles off people who would rebuild the ghetto.

Cason: We can look at all of the normally stated things; those staring us in the face: housing, unemployment and education. We look at all of these things. This is part of it and some of it is on the shoulders of the Negro. But we must focus on CAUSES. We must look at the fact that Negroes are systematically excluded from the mainstream of life.

I have three degrees. The struggle I endured getting these degrees would be a novel in itself. I have tried to live within the structure. You ask what are the causes. Anyone really wanting to make changes should be able to see what is happening. White America must be worked with as we have been working with the Negro. George Romney said that this is the most serious problem since the Civil War. I believe this.

I felt insulated by the middle class achievement, but now I see maybe it isn't too far off. Maybe the riots are a kind of suicide---but maybe it is worth while and would have more meaning in the end than my attempts to stay within the structure.

Corman: What is the difference in being a Negro in the North and the South?

Cason: Although I was born in the South, I have never really lived there.

There followed a discussion of living conditions for Negroes in the North and the South. Someone said that day-to-day existence met with more insults in the South.

Colding: Is there a bigger insult than Northern High School? Is there a bigger insult than going to Chrysler's and knowing that you are qualified and still are not getting the job?

- Colding: The difference is purely an intellectual exercise. Being black in the United States is the same anywhere; you feel the same way.
- Cason: But I felt physical danger in the South.
- Bagley: Is there any grown Negro male that anyone in this room knows who has not at some time been incarcerated?
Answer: NO.
- Cason: In 1963, I returned to Selma where I was born and where my family still lives. One Saturday my aunt and myself went to get some film. The country people were in town and the town was crowded. I went to the drugstore and told my aunt to go in and buy the film while I circled the block. I went around once and my aunt was out of the store without any film. I asked what had happened and she said she began to think of me circling the block and became fearful that someone would ask me what was I up to circling the block that way and I would answer them as if I were a human being and there would be trouble. We returned home without the film.
- Howard: I was born in Mississippi and I ran for a better life. But now I see there is no place to hide; it is going to be with you wherever you go. In the North it is not so public, but it is being done. In the United States, they allow people to get rich. You allow people to take money with high interest. FHA denies you a loan. The jobs are not there, and we will work. Black people do want to work.
- McCullach: Is there systematic exclusion of Negroes in the automobile industry?
- Mallett: The Negro is not turned away, but he fails the test. Or in the case of the guild unions, no one recommends him (craft unions require the recommendation of a member for acceptance.) We could wipe away all discrimination based on race alone, but education is still so bad that the problem is still there.
- Corman: But in the last five years things have been better.
- Bagley: The unemployment rate for the country as a whole has dropped to 4%, but the rate for Negroes has increased percentage wise.
- Howard: You talk about Willey Mays and Conrad Mallett. "See what you can do," they say. This does not benefit the man in the street.

Mallett: Let us be more specific.

Colding: I attend or will shortly attend University of Michigan where they practice racism by omission. I knew it would be bad, but I didn't know how bad. On a test I recently took to determine my personality traits, I was asked, "Do you enjoy sunbathing?"

The cause starts with education. What are some of the most insufferable parts of discrimination here? Racists in Detroit have the finest power structure in the country, and they are more skilled than in the South. The teachers in the schools here in the inner city are either old and not interested or they are young and naive. They are just babysitting. And through all of this the students are required to take tests which determine their lives; college entrance, aptitude, intelligence tests, and are expected to perform as indicated. But they are not tests of how enlightened you are, but how enwhitened you are. This attitude is throughout the entire society. It is in all of our institutions.

Cason: CONTINUES REPORT WHICH I WILL GET A COPY OF.
(HIS LIST OF GRIEVANCES)

The society will not commit itself to the eradication of these problems.

Wilson: For example, the Upward Bound Program for the entire country represents less than one day's expenditure in Vietnam and we are providing this program for only a small proportion of those needing and wanting it. We are not serious.

The existence of police brutality will not be accepted by the community. We are terrorized by it. The answer to this problem has been rejected across the country by the white police departments. We need Civilian Review Boards with power.

Colding: It is more than brutality. The police do not do those things they could; around Northern High School there are drugs being pushed, sometimes by the police, and they get their cut. There is organized crime and Girardin says he is not aware of it.

Corman: Does the Mafia exist in Detroit? Is there a numbers racket?

(Laughter)

Bagley: The riots are completely the responsibility of the white society and until they are willing to indict themselves, we will live in guerilla warfare.

Mr. Colding disparaged of the commission; of talking; of committees in general.

Corman: But we must meet together. We must talk together. There are a number of whites who are ready to move ahead.

Group: Where are they?

Mr. Corman estimated that 15% of the white population was ready.

Cason: The commitment must be very vital and immediate. We should be running a campaign; use mass media; use TV, etc. to talk to white America. We talk about the Negro being alienated from his society; Henry Ford is just as alienated as the Negro.

This is his community; let him get involved in this community. He makes his money here; let him be concerned about the city on which his power and income are based.

Colding: You talk about bringing up the Negro; you are not going to bring me up anywhere. YOU ARE GOING TO GET YOUR FOOT OFF MY BACK OR I AM GOING TO BREAK YOUR LEG.

Mrs. Howard: TALKING ABOUT THOSE PERSONS WHO SHE TALKS TO EVERY DAY: THOSE PEOPLE DIRECTLY CONCERNED IN THE RIOT.

A man came to the door last night, asking for a quarter. My husband went out to him; got up out of his bed and gave the man a quarter. My husband came back and said to me, "I can't believe how much he has gone down." I tried to help that man today. He has gone down with drink. I can't get him into a hospital. He has six kids and no job.

Everyone of us is the cause of this riot. The United States is built on capital. The poor is the capital, and we know that.

Bagley: The commissioners ought to spend two hours in our courts; Traffic and Recorder's Courts; see justice; see how the people don't have their say; it is their word against the cops.

Corman: What is the effect of Negro policemen?

Bagley: A Negro policeman has to show he doesn't favor you so he has to hit you harder.

Howard: This is nothing new; read your bible. The Israelites put blood on the side post so that their firstborn would be spared. "Soul Brother" was the same thing.

You look at this room we are meeting in. I go home to much worse (went on about the despair that people feel in poverty).

Cason: Short-range goals: Enlist industry and commerce, labor unions and craft unions to provide jobs. Get low income housing; get open housing; get an increased school program; enlarge programs such as Upward Bound and Head Start; change the tax structure so that we may accommodate these programs and get rid of the war in Vietnam.

Wilson: We need community centers in every neighborhood. Keep in touch with people. Visit their homes. Let us really have maximum feasible participation.

Mallett: There is a real need for MEANINGFUL jobs for youth between the ages of 16 and 21, for both white and Negro Youth. Schools must be changed; perhaps shorten the term.

There followed a lengthy discussion of existence of liquor stores and a question of why are they licensed in such quantity to go into these areas.

Also, a discussion of talk, talk, talk. Most of the people from Detroit felt this was just another talk session and that nothing would come out of it. Mr. Wilson indicated that there was little that would come out of this discussion; that there had been many such discussions; that the whole society was wrong; and further that there were those in Congress at that moment who had been illegally elected. McCullach was defensive, saying that things had changed. Wilson said, "that is just what I am saying. For the last ten years people have just begun to be concerned about second-class citizens.

Shortly thereafter, the meeting was adjourned.