

STATEMENT BY GOVERNOR RICHARD J. HUGHES  
TO THE GOVERNOR'S SELECT COMMISSION FOR THE  
STUDY OF CIVIL DISORDER IN NEW JERSEY

2-58

New Jersey has experienced a tragedy which, to paraphrase the President of the United States, no state should have to live through: a time of violence stalking the streets of cities in our State, a breakdown of law and order never before experienced in our history.

The aftermath of this deeply troubling eruption gives rise to a fixed determination that never again, if it is within our capacity to prevent it, shall such a tragedy occur. It was with the urgency of this problem in mind that I asked the distinguished members of this Select Commission to serve our State by examining the causes, the incidents, and the remedies for the civil disorders which have afflicted New Jersey.

In considering the magnitude and the shock of these occurrences, I have been recalling some very meaningful statements of leaders of this State and nation, for what has happened in New Jersey in many respects finds a parallel in what has happened in other parts of America. And so, in a sense somewhat different and more tragic than the reference of my distinguished predecessor Woodrow Wilson, New Jersey might be considered the laboratory state of the nation, and even as it has suffered from an illness common to that nation, so it may find the way to a cure for this grave and widespread affliction.

And another American President, John F. Kennedy, once said that, "The Chinese word 'crisis' is composed of two characters, one signifying danger and the other signifying opportunity...the (times have brought us) both danger and opportunities. Our task is to overcome the dangers in order to see the opportunities."

Thus, as you undertake these serious deliberations on behalf of your fellow citizens, you will certainly be considering the dangers to which New Jersey has been exposed as well as well as the opportunity which lies within our reach to make sure that we surmount these dangers not only for the benefit of New Jersey but indeed for the nation.

Some people say, and I must agree to a point, that these problems have been studied at length and that in many respects there is not much new that we can learn about these disorders and their underlying causes. However, I do believe

that the clear and credible judgment of a distinguished body such as this Select Commission should examine this matter from the vantage point of the unhappy intimacy we have had with it in New Jersey to the end that maximum light may be shed upon what may be the manifestation in New Jersey of an American problem.

It is the solution of these problems to which I hope the Commission will direct its attention in the months ahead, for what I am seeking, and what the people of New Jersey expect, is not a meaningless and detailed repetition of studies, but a realistic analysis of the disorders which erupted in New Jersey and practical proposals which, hopefully, will prevent their recurrence in our State.

It is important that the people of New Jersey be given a full, impartial report on the events in Newark and other communities in our State. It is necessary that the causes of these disorders, as seen by the Commission, be fully and objectively explored. But it is most important that the Commission, in its maturity and wisdom and with all the generous devotion which its members have so often given the well-being of New Jersey, 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.

In this connection we may recall another statement by Woodrow Wilson to the effect that:

"Government is not a warfare of interests. We shall not gain our ends by heat and bitterness, which make it impossible to think either calmly or fairly. Government is a matter of common counsel, and everyone must come into the consultations with the purpose to yield to the general view, the view which seems more nearly to correspond with the common interest."

Thus, as I conceive the mission of this body, you will involve yourselves not so much with recriminations from the past as with hopes and plans for the future. By this I do not mean that I expect the Commission to avoid a plain statement of whatever it determines to have been the causes of the disorders, but rather to rest upon that foundation of causal relationship a thoughtful declaration of those steps which are advisable to eliminate such causes and hence to prevent such disasters.

For example, it is more than likely that among the major causes of these tragedies has been a lack of communication between men who are or should be well disposed toward each other. It should be a major order of business for you to determine whether there indeed has been adequate communication--and full, sympathetic

and just discussion of problems and programs affecting minority groups in American life--between the people themselves and government at every level, as well as the business community, labor and other institutions. It must be determined whether the disorders in Newark and other areas were possibly, and to what degree, a matter of frustration stemming from an inability to obtain a fair consideration of the grievances of people in our predominantly Negro communities. I think it is a matter of common agreement that, even as communications between the nations of the world are necessary to understanding, so communication between fellow Americans in our pluralistic society is an indispensable prerequisite to understanding and, hence, to peace. In the connotation of a fair hearing and adequate communication, of course, we are not referring to a formalistic matter, but are really dealing with a sense of participation in which all Americans act toward American objectives together. We are not two nations or two cultures, as presently advocated by extremists who seek to divide America, but are rather, in the words of our familiar Pledge of Allegiance -- "one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

Perhaps you will determine that this latter part of that expression, "with liberty and justice for all," has been forgotten by many of us, leading to the separation of Americans, a situation which must be remedied, and very quickly, if we are to be the "one nation" which we should be.

This clause, "liberty and justice for all," raises another question. Has any breakdown of this ideal contributed to the strife which many people believe exists between the police community and the community of the disadvantaged? What part of this reported estrangement is attributable to alleged police brutality, and what part of it issues from the growing sense of disrespect for all discipline and authority, centering upon the public representatives of that authority, namely the police?

How may this estrangement be remedied? Should there not be a meaningful reorientation, both of some members of the police community in their outward attitude to citizens of all races, colors and creeds, and by the same token a renewed insistence by society upon respect for those responsible for law and order, including the police? How may all this, if need be, be accomplished?

As you know, I have already indicated an important strengthening of our police training effort, including an active recruitment program of the State Police to reach into the Negro community for some of the fine young men who should be added to the ranks of police professionalism. And other means may be suggested by this Commission for the restoration of mutual confidence and respect by the public and police authority, as all elements of our population come to recognize in that authority not only the symbol of law and peace in every community but also the main hope for the protection of the rights of human safety and private property. This is another way of saying that in America every man and every family should be safe and not feel compelled to live in a state of armed preparedness but be able to depend upon society for the securing of that peace and order which should exist in every community. A strong America need not be an armed camp. In the Preamble to the Constitution, "We the people of the United States" designed that Constitution, among other things, to "insure domestic tranquility." And when we consider what the clause "We the people" means to most observers shocked by this tragedy, 98 per cent of the Negro and white communities alike, it is apparent that the restoration of law and order is the necessary goal of all but that small group of racists, white and Negro alike, who invoke violence and murder in our streets. This tiny minority openly proclaims its hatred of America and must be isolated for the protection of America.

But I should make it perfectly clear that I do not look upon this Commission as a grand jury or a law enforcement agency of any kind, to the end that its specific scrutiny of individual cases would or might interfere with the due administration of justice or unconstitutionally affect the rights of those who might be called upon to face the bar of justice. Rather, with regard to this whole area of police-community relations, I would hope that, while a full review of the reports and treatment of specific cases and incidents may be necessary, and while, indeed, the fullest communication between the Commission and the public may be advisable, the Commission will direct itself primarily to a study and conclusion as to the general causes underlying whatever conditions it finds to exist, and concern itself, too, with recommendations to eliminate such causes.

Nor can the work of this Commission be complete without equal attention to the economic and social factors surrounding these disorders. A host of questions confronts you here--the unemployment factor; the ability of a member of the Negro community or a member, whatever his race, of the impoverished community to obtain a decent job; the matter of adequate training for those who would actively seek work but do not have the skills; the participation of the business community in efforts to seek out qualified people for positions; the degree of success or failure of government, business, labor and other institutions to really do something about reaching into the community with job opportunities so that all Americans can participate; and other basic relationships between the business community and citizens, regarding such things as cost to the consumer for basic commodities, consumer frauds and the like.

Many opinions have indicated that one of the causes of social collapse in our communities has been the breakdown in the family structure. Hence it may occur to the Commission, to examine this family breakdown, how the family may be restored, and whether existing welfare programs lend maximum opportunity and stability to the family unit.

The fulfillment or nonfulfillment of public policy, both on the State and Federal levels, with regard to housing, education, employment and general economic stability are other matters which will occur to the Commission in determining the root causes of the situation in which our society finds itself, with the dangers it presents both to the public order and to the realization of the American dream of equality and full opportunity which has been much too long in the attainment.

What is the adequacy or inadequacy of education in New Jersey today? This Commission could never hope to finish its task without an extensive study of the problems of education confronting those in our predominantly Negro communities. Once again, I am not speaking here of theories and studies which are frequently overworked. What I am concerned about is the real and immediate problem of providing adequate facilities and a high quality of education for the young people who should one day be the leaders of our communities and for the citizens who want to be equipped with the basic skills to obtain a decent job.

We must never forget that the training of our children has a decisive impact, for good or ill, upon those who will be the adult citizens and the leaders, for good or ill, of tomorrow's New Jersey society. Society must extend itself to reach out for these young minds with adequate education, with decent treatment, with all the tools at our command, for if we leave a vacuum, it will surely be filled by the extremism of the times. After all, these young people are Americans and they are worth fighting for and this, of course, means that we must see that each receives the highest level of meaningful and relevant education.

I am sure you will agree that this New Jersey problem cannot be considered as though New Jersey were a strange island separated from the nation of which it is a part. Consequently, I will ask the Commission to consider the posture in which the country finds itself today and the impact which those correct or mistaken solutions can have upon the problems of New Jersey.

Shall the nation adopt merely a repressive attitude, as though by increased riot control training of National Guard and police alone it can contain the disorders which must surely occur if matters stand as they are now? Should it not, giving due emphasis to these necessary protections to the peace and order of society, concentrate with utmost vigor upon the eradication of evils which exist so notoriously as almost to be beyond the necessity of proof?

For example, consider the situation of Newark, the scene of an American disaster which has shocked the nation, as portrayed in its application under the Federal Model Cities law, and by other sources:

Among the nation's largest cities with a population upwards of 400,000 people, it has the heaviest property tax burden in the nation; it has the sharpest shifts in population; it has the highest crime rate per 100,000 population; it has the highest rate of substandard housing; it has the highest rate of venereal disease; it has the highest rate of increase in tuberculosis; it has the highest rate of maternal mortality and the second highest rate in infant mortality; it is second highest in population density, and second highest in birth rate; it is seventh in the absolute number of drug addicts.

Newark's school system, now at 70,000 pupils, expects an additional enrollment of 10,000 this year; it is short several hundred certified teachers; there is a yearly turnover in the school system of 44 per cent--pupils moving

from school to school or into the system from the outside; one-third of the pupils each year are new arrivals; the cumulative dropout rate between the years 1962-1966 was 32 per cent. No new public school buildings were built in Newark between 1930 and 1955; three or four now in use were built before the turn of the century, and most of the schools are more than fifty years old. Unless nearly three hundred new classrooms are built or otherwise made available for next year, large numbers of youngsters will have to go on triple sessions, meaning three hours of school per day per youngster.

Is it not clear, in consideration of these facts, that we have fallen far short of the mark in our quest for excellence and the opportunity for a decent life and a meaningful education for every citizen? I ask this Commission to determine not only the deficiencies, not only the distance we have yet to go, but also, and more importantly, how we and the nation may promptly traverse this distance and reach the goal which America must seek.

I have not undertaken to describe the full dimensions of the problem which your State has placed before you. You are, truly, probing into the soul and future not only of New Jersey but of the nation. Thus you can understand the importance of the mission which you are undertaking so generously and with such determination. I offer you all of the assistance that State Government can provide. I commend you for your devotion to the State which we all love so much, and I encourage you upon the fulfillment of a mission which is most important to its future.

The motto of one of our sister states is this: "The life of the land is the pursuit of righteousness" In a real sense, your mission for New Jersey is the pursuit of righteousness, not only for the securing of public order but for the attainment of social justice on which it ultimately must depend.

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