



A Clarion Book

# The Politics of Protest

**A Task Force Report Submitted to  
the National Commission on the  
Causes and Prevention of Violence**

**Under the Direction of  
Jerome H. Skolnick  
With a Foreword by  
William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs**



# THE POLITICS OF PROTEST

---

*A Report Submitted by*

JEROME H. SKOLNICK, DIRECTOR

Task Force on Violent Aspects  
of Protest and Confrontation  
of the National Commission  
on the Causes and Prevention of Violence



*A Clarion Book*

PUBLISHED BY SIMON AND SCHUSTER

All rights reserved  
including the right of reproduction  
in whole or in part in any form  
Published by Simon and Schuster  
Rockefeller Center, 630 Fifth Avenue  
New York, New York 10020

FIRST PRINTING

SBN 671-20381-9 Trade edition  
SBN 671-20416-5 Clarion paperback edition  
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 75-91304  
Manufactured in the United States of America

## **Statement on the Research Study**

The Commission was directed to "go as far as man's knowledge takes" it in searching for the causes of violence and the means of prevention. These studies are reports to the Commission by independent scholars and lawyers who have served on task forces and study teams; they are not reports by the Commission itself. Publication of any of the reports should not be taken to imply endorsement of their contents by the Commission, or by any member of the Commission staff, including the Executive Director and other staff officers, not directly responsible for the preparation of the particular report. Both the credit and the responsibility for the reports lie in each case with the directors of the task forces and study teams. The Commission is making the reports available at this time as works of scholarship to be judged on their merits, so that the Commission as well as the public may have the benefit of both the reports and informed criticism and comment on their contents.

MILTON S. EISENHOWER  
Chairman

## Staff

*Director:* Jerome H. Skolnick

*General Counsel*

Ira M. Heyman  
School of Law  
University of California  
Berkeley

*Associate Director*

Anthony Platt  
School of Criminology  
University of California  
Berkeley

*Asst. General Counsel*

Edmund C. Ursin  
Office of the General Counsel  
Department of the Air Force

*Assistant Director*

Elliott Currie  
Department of Sociology  
University of California  
Berkeley

*Accountant*

Herbert Kalman, C.P.A.

*Staff Administrator*

Sharon Dunkle Marks

*Research Asst. to Director*

Richard Speigman

*Asst. Staff Administrator*

Lee Maniscalco

*Research Assistants*

Charles Carey  
Howard Erlanger  
Nancy Leonard  
Sam McCormick  
Alan Meyerson

*Office Staff*

Kathleen Courts  
Gabriella Duncan  
Emily Knapp  
Wendy Mednick  
Sharon Overton  
Charlotte Simmons

*Supporting Research Assts.*

Susan Currier  
Howard Schechter  
Nelson Soltman  
H. Frederick Willkie, III

*Supporting Office Staff*

Mary Alden  
Jayne Craddock  
Judy Dewing  
Sally Duensing  
Sue Feinstein

Judy Foosaner  
Vera Nielson  
Elizabeth Okamura  
Melba Sharp  
Betty Wallace

## **Staff Consultants**

David Chalmers  
Kermit Coleman  
Thomas Crawford  
Frederick Crews  
Amitai Etzioni  
Richard Flacks  
Joseph Gusfield

Irving Louis Horowitz  
Marie-Helene leDivelec  
Martin Liebowitz  
Sheldon Messinger  
Richard Rubenstein  
Rodney Stark

## **Advisory Consultants**

Richard Albares  
Isaac Balbus  
Herman Blake  
Robert Blauner  
Ed Cray  
Harold Cruse  
Caleb Foote  
Allen Grimshaw  
Max Heirich

David Matza  
Henry Mayer  
Phillipe Nonet  
Thomas Pettigrew  
Robert Riley  
J. Michael Ross  
Peter Scott  
Charles Sellers  
Philip Selznick

## **Foreword**

by

**Price M. Cobbs, M.D.**

and

**William H. Grier, M.D.**

**Authors of Black Rage**

The National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence has a grave task. If violence continues at its present pace, we may well witness the end of the grand experiment of democracy. The unheeded report of the Kerner Commission pinpointed the cause of our urban violence, and this Report presents the tragic consequences when those in power fail to act on behalf of the weak as well as the powerful. The Director and staff of this Task Force will have served the country well if this Report furnishes the Commissioners with that information needed for them to demand that the country institute solutions and not merely further studies.

This volume shows that an understanding of violence does not mean that it will be condoned, but that the better informed will be in a better position to remove its causes. This document further reminds us that if violence is to be eliminated in our society, then we must broaden its definition.

Our country seems only to respond to a visible domestic violence where people are killed or injured and property is destroyed. In the wake of this type of violence there are demands for law and order, and then promptly forgotten are the victims and causes of such violence.

As social psychiatrists we know that violence comes in many forms and that the psychological violence the nation inflicts is usually ignored. To debase a segment of the population on the basis of skin color is to do irreparable harm to them. To allow millions of Americans to remain hungry, to subsist in poverty and to live in unfit housing is as destructive to them as actual physical violence. If students burn draft cards and cite the war in Southeast Asia as an example of the hypocrisy of this country, are they being as violent as the military or the mayor of a city who says "shoot to kill?" To continue our brutality to the people of Vietnam and to our soldiers is to be violent. All of this must cease if our country is to reduce the level of violence and repair our national schisms.

Our hope is that Americans will read this book and initiate positive actions. A society solves a problem only when a majority of its people involves itself in the process of resolution. This country can no longer tolerate the divisions of black and white, haves and have-nots. The pace of events has quickened and dissatisfactions no longer wait for a remedy.

There are fewer great men among us to counsel patience. Their voices have been stilled by the very violence they sought to prevent. Martin Luther King, Jr., the noble advocate of nonviolence, may have been the last great voice warning the country to cancel its rendezvous with violence before it is too late.

The truth is plain to see. If the racial situation remains inflammatory and the conditions perpetuating poverty remain unchanged, and if vast numbers of our young see small hope for improvement in the quality of their lives, then this country will remain in danger. Violence will not go away because we will it and any superficial whitewash will sooner or later be recognized.

It has been said that this is a country with a tradition of violence, but we still wonder what is so special about the time in which we live that again we must struggle to maintain peace inside our nation. This analysis tells us that the kind of violence now involving us has occurred with regularity whenever a population committed to social change has confronted people committed to a defense of the status quo.



It seems that we never learn.

In colleges and universities, many educators have frequently acknowledged archaic admission standards and outdated curriculums, but they have done little to change them. Teachers, it has been said, should teach more and schools should relate to surrounding communities and involve themselves in the resolution of the problems of a modern world. Yet when black students ask for these same things, they are met with indifference and hostility. Who is to blame for the ensuing abrasions?

Over the past decade, black Americans have undergone profound changes in their conceptions of themselves and the world in which they live. It is ironic how many of these changes have remained unnoticed by many whites, even those white Americans purporting to make scientific inquiries into the thoughts, feelings and behavior of black people. Black Americans are undergoing a psychological revolution and, considering its implications, the wonder is that up to now it has been so peaceful.

In a short period we have seen a significant segment of Americans move from calling themselves colored, to Negro, to black, and now Black-American. A militant challenging posture has become a commonplace among blacks. They are determined to make America a better place for themselves and for all disenfranchised.

We take the position that the growth of this country has occurred around a series of violent upheavals and that each one has thrust the nation forward. The Boston Tea Party was an attempt by a few to alter an oppressive system of taxation without representation. The validation of these men rested on their attempts to effect needed social change. If the Boston Tea Party is viewed historically as a legitimate method of producing such change, then present-day militancy, whether by blacks or students, can claim a similar legitimacy.

Understood or not, this country is now in the midst of a major social revolution. Revolution suggests a drastic change and this is what black Americans are experiencing. A revolution turns from peaceful reform to violence when it encounters brutal, mindless resistance to change. If the black segment of our population is undergoing a maturing psychological and

social change, and these maturing changes are not matched in white Americans, then the seeds of violence are sown. And if truth is the goal of any scholarly inquiry, we must conclude that too few white Americans are changing fundamental beliefs and behavior.

It is a contemporary tragedy that many leaders are in reality preaching the very violence they profess to deplore. They are inviting violence if they urge one part of the citizenry to stand pat while others are in transformation. Men who govern this country have a strange sense of leadership if they make appeals to law and order which are in effect thinly disguised messages to white Americans telling them they do not need to change their attitudes and actions. College administrators who respond to student demands as reactionary politicians rather than as progressive educators seem to ask to preside over institutions inviting more violence rather than less.

The way to avoid disorder is to appeal to the idealism of America; to facilitate change rather than resist it. If there is a streak of violence in the national character, then it is precisely that streak which sets itself in opposition to change. To resist necessary and healthy change in today's America is to invite social tumult and lay responsibility for it at the feet of black or student militancy.

Our history is filled with examples of the powerless determined to bring their grievances to a just hearing. We forget that many now powerful and entrenched social institutions were once engaged as a minority, and at times violently, in pressing claims to legitimacy.

Any American with union membership and a sense of fairness, who recalls the early stormy days of American unionism, should have immediate understanding of the struggles of contemporary black people.

While the communications media concentrate on the so-called excesses of students, this report shows clearly that most of the violence at universities is attributable to the policies of those in power—trustees, politicians, administrators, and finally, the unlawful actions of police called to campuses.

If the true instigators of violence are to be eliminated, how can we bypass the Police Establishment? In a few short years the ranks of law enforcement have become an ultraconserva-

tive social force which shrilly protests positive change. We submit that the violence done by this group will decrease only when every member of a minority group, whether racial or political, knows that the police will protect him as diligently as his white counterpart.

The Commission on Violence could serve no higher function than to commend this volume for reading by high government officials who seem determined to make violence much more a reality by appeals to rigidity and the "good old days." Men in high places must answer to history as well as conscience when they cite the black militant's style as an excuse for ignoring his just demands. They must live with their stupidity if they pander to a white bigotry which advocates resistance to any change that might threaten the status quo. Our country has achieved greatness by its ability to respond and grow, and history will deal harshly with those who block this growth by refusal to learn from the past.

Black Americans are now responding to their time in history and can no more be stopped than any idea whose time has come. They have been bred on the words of freedom, but immersed in bigotry and oppression, and their moment has arrived. Those who cannot see this are guilty of an inattention to the social ripenings that have enriched this land. There should be no mystery why students and antiwar protestors use the songs and style of black protest. Their own cause is strengthened when they share the momentum of a movement so eminently right and so certainly in the American tradition.

Violence is sure to increase if those who are responsible for the management of our country do not understand the driving force behind current protest. Our hope is that this Report will make more people see that there is a clear and present danger to our survival as a free society if fundamental changes are not made in American thought and institutions.

Justice has aligned itself with those who have been patient. The strivings of Blacks are on the side of democracy. Those who oppose these strivings, whether by appeals to law and order, states rights, or outright hatred, flirt with danger and with fascism.

Our clinical work has convinced us that all black Americans

are angry. All are asking for social change. There is a rage in black people which is a rage for justice. It demonstrates a passion for humanity at a time when few others are passionate.

And now there are stirrings among Spanish-speaking Americans, forgotten Indians, and poor and alienated whites, stirrings that tell us that a recalcitrant America has more than blacks to contend with.

We think that Americans can avert violence both in this country and the world by siding with rapid social evolution. If the relevant issues are race and poverty and peace, then we must move people to face these issues honestly and take action to reduce conflict. For those who doubt that many can change, we would say only that change is most rapid when the situation is most desperate.

We must abandon hypocrisy and aim for honesty. Can one find the answer to the question of poverty in a land of affluence by going to the poor alone, or must not inquiries be directed to the rich and powerful who are responsible for an unequal distribution of wealth and a system of taxation which subsidizes the affluent? Can we determine why the poor are sick by asking only them, or must we not go also to the major centers of medical care?

The leadership of this country has a solemn duty not to let this be another in a long series of such reports. The patriotism of our leaders must be called into question if the facts about a problem are clearly spelled out and people continue to suffer because no action is taken.

This Report clearly reveals that Americans must at last confront grievous wrongs and set swiftly to right them. The situation is critical and alternatives to violence must be found. Our leaders have a noble opportunity to demonstrate that change must not be feared but welcomed and embraced.

Price M. Cobbs, M. D.  
William H. Grier, M. D.  
San Francisco, California  
May 15, 1969

## Preface

This report is not an investigation, it is an analysis. It is based on facts collected from many sources over many years, plus some original field research begun and completed in a period of less than five months. The contract for the report was signed on August 28, 1968, and the final draft of the report was sent to the Commission on March 21, 1969. It is an attempt to understand the nature and causes of protest and confrontation in the United States, and their occasional eruption into violence. Our aim has been as much to describe what contemporary protest is *not* as to determine what contemporary protest *is*. The public response to protest is surrounded by misconceptions concerning the extent, nature, and goals of contemporary protest and the composition of protest groups. A major goal of our analysis, therefore, has been to challenge these misconceptions in order that responsible discussion may take place unencumbered by misunderstanding and distortion.

The assignment we were given was far-ranging, as the Table of Contents indicates. We have tried to be as objective as possible in our analysis, but objectivity is not synonymous with a lack of perspective. Our analysis makes no pretense at being "value-free." Our operating bias may be made explicit; we are partial to the values of equality, participation, and le-

gality—in short, to those values we think of as the values of a constitutional democracy. We believe in due process of law and look toward a society in which order is achieved through consent, not coercion.

As social analysts we recognize, however, that violence has often been employed in human history, in America as elsewhere, to obtain social, political, and economic goals, and that it has been used both by officials and by ordinary citizens. For us, it is not enough to deplore violence—we seek to understand what it is and what it is not, as well as its nature and causes. Our title reflects our emphasis. This point of view was recently expressed in an article by Bruce L. R. Smith, coincidentally titled “The Politics of Protest.” He writes:

Violence has always been part of the political process. Politics does not merely encompass the actions of legislative assemblies, political parties, electoral contests and the other formal trappings of a modern government. Protest activities of one form or another, efforts to dramatize grievances in a fashion that will attract attention, and ultimately the destruction or threatened destruction of life and property appear as expressions of political grievances even in stable, consensual societies. In one sense, to speak of violence in the political process is to speak of the political process; the *ultima ratio* of political action is force. Political activity below the threshold of force is normally carried on with the knowledge that an issue may be escalated into overt violence if a party feels sufficiently aggrieved.

The intellectual freedom offered to us was absolute. Except for agonizing limitations of time, we were offered the best conceivable terms under which to do the job. In addition, the Commission staff was generous with its encouragement. No institution or affiliated organization, nor the Commission itself, nor the Task Force staff, is to be held responsible for the final report as it appears here. That responsibility rests solely with the Director of the Task Force.

The question of responsibility aside, however, whatever merit the report may have, and that it was completed on time, is to be attributed to a tireless and devoted staff and group of consultants. Five people should be singled out. Ira M. Heyman bore principal responsibility for organizing and

conducting hearings before the Commission, and contributed wise counsel throughout the writing of the report. Elliott Currie, Anthony Platt, and Edmund C. Ursin were the workhorses of the staff. They not only drafted major portions of the report, they also were companions in the development of the tone and direction of the report as a whole. Sharon Dunkle Marks' title of staff administrator does not wholly indicate her contribution. In addition to administration, she made an intellectual contribution through discussion, writing, and interviewing. Besides, she brought some badly needed charm to the whole enterprise.

There were two classes of consultants: those who submitted papers (staff consultants), and those who submitted critiques (advisory consultants). The contributions of consultants to particular chapters were as follows: Chapter I drew heavily upon a paper by Richard Rubenstein and was informed by Amitai Etzioni's research; Chapter II drew heavily from a paper by Frederick Crews, and was further informed by a research contribution from Irving Louis Horowitz; both of them, moreover, contributed wise counsel at different times in the enterprise. Chapter III relied heavily upon the research of Richard Flacks and Joseph Gusfield and also drew upon a paper by Marie-Helene leDivelec; Chapter IV was informed by interviews conducted by, and in consultation with, Kermit Coleman; Chapter VI was informed by a paper submitted by David Chalmers. Thomas Crawford's paper served as the basis for Chapter V. Chapter VII drew upon a paper submitted by Rodney Stark and made use of materials collected by Ed Cray. Chapter VIII relies upon a variety of materials on courts during crisis, as well as some written materials prepared by Sheldon Messinger. Chapter IX was informed by a contribution from Martin Liebowitz.

Our base of operations was the Center for the Study of Law and Society, University of California, Berkeley. Its Chairman, Philip Selznick, and its Vice-Chairman, Sheldon Messinger, were gracious and generous with the facilities of the Center. As guests we were made to feel not merely welcome, but at home. Moreover, Drs. Selznick and Messinger were significant consultants throughout the development of the manuscript. Nine seminars on chapters and consultant pa-

pers were attended by Center Associates and guests. The seminars ranged in size from twenty to fifty persons, and especially valuable comments were made by Howard Becker, Herbert Blumer, Robert Cole, Sanford Kadish, William Kornhauser, David Matza, Neil Smelser, and Allen Grimshaw, among others. The seminars were an enormously valuable experience, and all the participants listed and unlisted deserve our gratitude.

Our advisory consultants are listed on a separate page.

Opinion research organizations generously provided helpful advice, numerous reports and tables summarizing opinion polls, and permission to publish data and tables: American Institute of Public Opinion; Louis Harris and Associates; Louis Harris Political Data Center; National Opinion Research Center; Roper Research Associates; and the University of Michigan Survey Research Center. Naturally, these organizations and their representatives are not responsible for the conclusions and interpretations we have drawn that may have differed from theirs.

Other members of the staff worked tirelessly to finish on time: Charles Carey, Howard Erlanger, Sam McCormick, and Richard Speiglman. Nancy Leonard was our Washington, D.C., research assistant, and was invaluable in getting necessary materials to the Berkeley staff. Our office staff was tireless, devoted, intelligent, and tolerant. Given our deadlines, we needed tolerance most of all.

Finally, my wife, Dr. Arlene Skolnick, served as a consultant on social psychology, helped with the editing, and, best of all, gave birth to Michael's brother, Alexander, on September 29, 1968.

Jerome H. Skolnick,  
Center for the Study of Law and Society  
University of California  
Berkeley, California  
March 21, 1969



# Summary

## Chapter I: Protest and Politics

There are three critical points about protest and violence in America:

—There has been relatively little violence accompanying contemporary demonstration and group protest.

It is often difficult to determine who was “responsible” for the violence when it does occur. The evidence in the Walker Report and other similar studies suggests that authorities often bear a major part of the responsibility.

—Mass protest, whether or not its outcome is violent, must be analyzed in relation to crises in American institutions.

For these reasons, serious analysis of the connections between protest and violence cannot focus solely on the character or culture of those who protest the current state of the American political and social order. Rather, our research finds that mass protest is an essentially political phenomenon engaged in by normal people; that demonstrations are increasingly being employed by a variety of groups, ranging from students and blacks to middle-class professionals, public employees, and policemen; that violence, when it occurs, is usually not planned, but arises out of an interaction between protesters and responding authorities; that violence has fre-