

## **Executive Summary**

In June, 1968, a few days after the assassination of Senator Robert F. Kennedy and 2 months after the assassination of the Reverend Martin Luther King, President Lyndon B. Johnson established the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence -- with Johns Hopkins President Emeritus Milton S. Eisenhower as chairman and Judge A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr. as vice-chairman. On December 10, 1969, the Commission issued its final report, preceded by many volumes of staff task force reports.

The Commission was bipartisan. In terms of philosophy, the views of Commission members ran the gamut from Judge Higginbotham, Michigan Senator Philip Hart, Ambassador Patricia Roberts Harris and longshoreman-philosopher Eric Hoffer to Terrence Cardinal Cooke, Ohio Representative William McCulloch, Arizona Judge William McFarland and Nebraska Senator Roman Hruska. (Appendix 1 has biographical summaries of all Trustees and Milton Eisenhower's letter of transmission to the President, dated December 10, 1969.)

Lacking public action, the Commission predicted, in 1969, a "city of the future" in which the affluent would escape to gated communities and more distant suburbs. The suburbs would be connected by "sanitized corridors" to high rise office buildings protected by high technology in central business districts that would become deserted at night. The corridors would run over or bypass "ghetto slum" neighborhoods -- places of "terror and widespread crime."

### **Principal Findings**

Based on the Preamble to the Constitution, the Commission's final report on December 10, 1969 was titled, *To Establish Justice, to Insure Domestic Tranquility*. Our principal finding is that, 30 years later, these goals have not been met.

How do we stand on justice today? Almost a quarter of all children 5 and under live in poverty. America is the most unequal country in the industrialized world in terms of income and wealth. The "digital divide" is accelerating the gulf between our haves and have nots. The average CEO makes 419 times as much as the average worker, and this ratio has greatly increased over the last 3 decades. The states spend more on prison building than on higher education, whereas the opposite was true at the time of the Commission. One in 3 young African-American men is in prison, on probation or on parole, up from 1 in 4 a decade ago. The rate of incarceration of African-American men today is 4 times higher than the rate of incarceration of Black men in pre-Mandela, apartheid South Africa. A primary reason is the racial bias in our sentencing laws. Filled disproportionately by minorities, our rapidly expanding prison-industrial complex is run by white men, and rural white communities send lobbyists to Washington to win grants for prisons to help in local economic development.

How do we stand on domestic tranquility today? There have been drops in violent crime, fear and unemployment since about 1993. That is welcome news -- though homicide increased by about 10% in New York City in 1999.

However the short-run decline in fear and violence since 1993 has led politicians and the media to a new and misplaced "triumphalism." To some extent, the new triumphalism represents a state of denial -- in which we exaggerate our recent successes against serious crime and ignore the implications of our high violence rates vis-a-vis other countries, not to mention our vast prison population. But there is also another problem. Although there have been significant reductions in violent crime since the early 1990s, the new triumphalism is misleading on the "why" of those declines. This interpretation is dangerous, in that it could lead us to adopt (or to continue) all the wrong anticrime policies while ignoring the things that could make an enduring difference.

The misleading triumphalism has 2 facets. First, it exaggerates the role of tough sentencing laws and tough "zero tolerance" policing in accounting for the welcome declines in crime in the last few years. Second, it *underestimates* the role of other, economic and human investment factors, like reduced unemployment, that may be more important. Put together, those twin fallacies constitute the core of a rigid policy ideology. In the words of historian Barbara Tuchman, "Rigidifying leads to increase of investment and the need to protect egos; policy founded on error multiplies, never retreats."<sup>1</sup>

Most important, in spite of our present short run gains and in spite of a sevenfold increase in the prison population since the Violence Commission, fear and violent crime is for the most part *higher* today than in 1969, when a Commission task force report said "few things are more pervasive, more frightening, more real today than violent crime and the fear of being assaulted, mugged, robbed or raped."

Specifically, in a national poll in 1967, Americans were asked, "Is there any area right around here -- that is within a mile -- where you would be afraid to walk alone at night?" In 1967, 31% answered yes. In 1998, 41% answered yes. Similarly, the FBI Index of violent crime (murder, rape, robbery and assault combined) has increased from a big city offense rate per 100,000 of 860 in 1969 to 1218 in 1998. (Appendix 5). America's rates of violence remain *much higher* than most other industrialized nations, as in the 1960s. Today the rate of homicide death for a young man is 23 times higher in the U.S. than in England. In 1995, handguns were used to kill 2 people in New Zealand, 15 in Japan, 30 in Great Britain, 106 in Canada, 213 in Germany and 9,390 in the United States.

### **How Officials and The Media Underreport Criminality**

One of the most distinctive things about the United States with respect to crime and punishment is that we not only have an unusually high level of serious violent crime -- but we maintain that high level of violent crime despite the fact that we *also* boast the highest level of incarceration of any country in the world but 1 (and when it comes to incarceration for ordinary street crimes, we probably even beat Russia).

This distinction points to a serious defect in the crime statistics used by our officials and reported by the media. What we call the "crime rate" measures the activity of those criminals who are still on the street. That kind of measure is useful in many ways. But as a measure of the deeper problem of criminality -- as an indicator of the tendency of our society to produce criminals -- it is obviously defective. Measuring crime this way is like measuring the extent of some physical illness in our society while systematically excluding from the count all those people who are so sick we've had to put them in the hospital. No one would think of doing that in the field of public health: We do it as a matter of course when it comes to the official crime statistics used by our leaders and the media.

If we were to measure our crime problem by our tendency to produce *criminality*, then we may be in a real sense losing the "war on crime" even as we have successfully hidden some of the losses behind prison walls -- and therefore appear superficially to be winning it.

That obviously gives us a very different sense of the health of our society and the effectiveness of our present policies. But looking at crime this way is only common sense. We feel intuitively that something is *especially* wrong if we have *both* very high rates of violent crime *and* very high incarceration rates, at the same time -- something that isn't captured in the conventional crime rate alone. Suppose 2 countries have the same official rate of violent crime, but 1 country has, proportionally, 5 times as many violent offenders behind bars. Do they really have the same violent crime problem?

This is much more than a statistical quibble. The fact is that this is the way we go about measuring most *other* social ills -- with the exception of criminality. In a reasonable culture we would not say we had won the war against disease just because we had moved a lot of sick people from their homes to hospital wards. And in a reasonable culture we would not say we have won the war against crime just because we have moved a lot of criminals from the community into prison cells.

### **What Works?**

Yet, since the Violence Commission, we have learned a great deal about policy that doesn't work and that does work, based on scientific evaluation. Accordingly, our primary policy recommendation in this 30 year update is to stop doing what doesn't work and to replicate what does work -- but at a scale equal to the dimensions of the problem.

What doesn't work particularly well includes prison building, bootcamps, "zero tolerance" policing, the "war on drugs," supply side tax breaks for the rich, Enterprise Zones and the Job Training Partnership Act for high school dropouts.

What doesn't work often is sugar coated with false political rhetoric. For example, America won the Gulf War in the early 1990s with sufficient numbers of sufficiently paid staff and good equipment. Yet we are told that money for staff and equipment for inner city schools and for dynamic, private inner city, nonprofit organizations is not available. Instead, we often are told, inner city solutions largely should be based on "volunteerism,"

"self-sufficiency" and "empowerment." Sometimes, that is a double standard by officials who will not invest in human capital.

What doesn't work also can be immoral. For example, we believe it is immoral for the states to spend more on prison building than higher education, especially when almost a quarter of the youngest children live in poverty. There is a need for a national campaign to mobilize the clergy to regain the high moral ground.

What works, based on scientific evaluation? Leading examples include Head Start preschool, safe havens after school, the public School Development Plan of Professor James Comer at Yale University, full service community schools in which nonprofit organizations partner with individual inner-city schools, the Ford Foundation's Quantum Opportunities Program to keep inner-city youth in high school and "training first" (not "work first") job preparation for out-of-school youth modeled after the Argus Community in the South Bronx. *All of these successes reduce crime.* All also improve educational performance and develop youth in positive directions. Most also reduce drug involvement and improve employability. All have been successfully replicated.

Other examples of what works include YouthBuild USA, in which dropouts rehab housing; nonprofit community development corporations, modeled after Robert Kennedy's Mobilization for Youth, to generate inner city jobs; community-based banking to generate inner-city capital; problem-oriented, community-equity policing in which young minority officers mentor youth; diversion of nonviolent offenders from prison to treatment as begun by the State of Arizona; proven high quality drug treatment in the community closely integrated with local drug courts; the Delancey Street model in San Francisco for self-sufficiently reintegrating ex-offenders back into the community; and in-prison drug treatment like Delaware's Key Program.

Together, these existing successes simultaneously reduce crime and fear, improve education, increase employment and economically develop the community. Replicated to scale by knowledgeable leaders, *what we already know to work* can create a comprehensive, interdependent, national urban and criminal justice policy that simultaneously establishes justice and insures domestic tranquility. Such investment needs to be supported by a national economic policy that gives first priority to eliminating child poverty and creating full employment for all, including, especially, the hard-to-employ in the inner city and pockets of rural poverty.

### **A New Grassroots Federalism**

Corporations should be asked to play as great a role as they are capable of in such a policy -- especially in terms of training and jobs. But the failure of supply side economics has made it painfully clear that only the federal government can raise the funds needed for a national policy that replicates what works to scale, eliminates child poverty and secures full employment for the hard-to-employ. At the same time, we need a new grassroots federalism in which the federal government then distributes most resources directly to local government, and especially to the private, nonprofit, inner-city organizations responsible for so much of what works.

Grassroots federalism replicated to scale should be financed through reductions in programs that don't work; fractional reductions in affirmative action for the rich, corporate welfare and the military budget; and use of a small part of the budget surplus. If, as part of its \$1.8T federal budget, the nation will not find the resources to replicate what works to scale during an unprecedented economic boom, it is uncertain whether America ever will solve its endemic problems, *even though we have the knowledge to do so.*

### **Changing the Will of Our Leaders**

Public opinion polls tend to support the priorities set forth on these pages. For example, new public opinion findings by Albert and Susan Cantril show a majority of voters are against "government" in the abstract but for specific government investments, especially in education, training and jobs.

In spite of public opinion to the contrary, too much federal legislation in recent years has sought to expand programs that don't work and reduce programs that do work. Nor has there been any federal legislative attempt to replicate what works to a scale equal to the dimensions of the problem.

To change the will and action of political leaders, and, if necessary, to help bypass them through grassroots action and referendums, we need real campaign finance reform and a communicating what works movement that better informs voters that we do have the answers. One part of such a movement is training thousands of grassroots, nonprofit inner city leaders, advocates and clergy in "Television School," to learn how to combat the overemphasis by local television news on negative and violent stories and underemphasis on stories about what works. These local television news

priorities can cause many average citizens to believe no positive solutions exist. Another part is for new foundations based on information age fortunes to fund local community web sites through which grassroots leaders and clergy can organize advocacy against misleading mainstream media and for candidates pledged to what works.

### **Sentencing, Media and Firearms**

A comprehensive national policy based on existing scientific evidence needs to reduce the disparity in sentencing between crack and powder cocaine, by reducing excessively long sentences for crack-related offenses; reduce the power of big media conglomerates so we can diminish entertainment and commercial violence on television; reinvigorate public television; create a national media literacy policy as a core component of the K-12 education curriculum; link firearms control to campaign finance reform; reinforce recent state and local successes in firearms control; encourage litigation against firearms manufacturers; create a national firearms licensing system; enact a federal ban on Saturday night specials; and regulate firearms as consumer products. There is considerable public opinion to support these recommendations -- including, for example, new political alliances between central city residents and more conservative "soccer mom" suburbanites in the wake of the recent wave of gun killings of children and youth in our schools, day care centers and places of worship.

### **A New Political Alliance**

To turn our recommendations into policy, we need a new voting majority, a new political alliance. The alliance must bring together middle income Americans (who often need 2 or 3 jobs in the family to make ends meet) wage earners (who need to know that their CEOs earn on the average 419 times as much as they do) and the poor (who suffered in the 1980s and hardly improved in the 1990s). The alliance should be based on the common ground of education and re-education, training and re-training for the global marketplace. It also should be based on growing resentment by many Americans of an unfair economic deal -- in which the wealth of the super rich who are getting richer is not earned, but falls into place without effort as a result of our one dollar, one vote democracy.

In the late 1960s, after numbing assassinations and street riots, and with an understanding of how America's culture of violence produced crime rates far higher than other industrialized nations, the Violence Commission concluded that the greatness and durability of most civilizations has been determined not by external assault but by internal decay. Our civilization will be no exception.

The challenges within America require vision, not incrementalism and policy bites. Vision is needed from the grassroots to the White House. We need big solutions to big problems. That is what America always has been about. It is about dreaming and trying to fulfill those dreams, however long they may have been deferred.

In the words of historian James MacGregor Burns, "While centrists cautiously seek the middle way, leaders in science, technology, education, entertainment, finance and the media pursue their own transforming visions."<sup>2</sup> Isn't it time to establish justice and insure domestic tranquility through the transforming visions of grassroots movements and, perhaps, even of our leaders?