

# Johnson Statement on Violence

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 10 —

Following is the text of a statement made today by President Johnson at the White House to members of the new commission to investigate violence:

This troubled world will long remember the scar of the past week's violence.

But when the week is remembered, let this be remembered too: That out of anguish came a national resolve to search for the causes—and to find the cures—for the outbursts of violence which have brought so much heartbreak to the nation.

Violence has erupted in many parts of the globe—from the streets of newly emerging nations to the old cobblestones of Paris. But it is the episodes of violence in our own country which must command our attention now.

Our inquiry into that violence brings us together at the White House this afternoon.

You come here from the church, the universities, the Senate and the House, the judiciary, the ranks of the working man, the professions.

My charge to you is simple and direct. I ask you to undertake a penetrating search for the causes and prevention of violence — a search into our national life, our past as well as our present, our traditions as well as our institutions, or culture, our customs and our laws.

I hope your search will yield:

First, an understanding and insight into the kinds of violent aberrations which have struck down public figures and private citizens alike.

First, an understanding and insight into the kinds of violent aberrations which have struck down public figures and private citizens alike.

#### 4 Presidents Slain

One out of every five Presidents since 1865 has been assassinated — Lincoln in April 1865, Garfield in July 1881, McKinley in September 1901 and John F. Kennedy in November 1963. In this same period, there have been attempts on the lives of one out of every three Presidents, including Theodore Roosevelt while campaigning in October 1912, President-elect Franklin D. Roosevelt in February 1933 and Harry S. Truman in November 1950. In the attempt on Roosevelt's life, Mayor Anton Cermak of Chicago was killed. In the attack on President Truman, a White House policeman lost his life.

The list of assassinations during the last five years is long and shocking. Here are some:

In 1963: Medgar Evers, ambushed by a sniper; four Negro girls killed in a church bombing; President John F. Kennedy assassinated. Eight thousand five hundred Americans were murdered that year.

In 1964: Three civil rights workers murdered as part of a Ku Klux Klan conspiracy; Lieut. Col. Lemuel Penn shot down on a highway. Nine thousand two hundred and fifty Americans were murdered that year.

In 1965: Mrs. Viola Luizzo. Nine thousand eight hundred and fifty Americans were murdered that year.

In 1966: Malcolm X. Ten

thousand nine hundred and twenty Americans were murdered that year.

In 1967: George Lincoln Rockwell. Twelve thousand two hundred and thirty Americans were murdered that year.

In 1968: Martin Luther King Jr. and Senator Robert F. Kennedy.

Just yesterday, a Jordanian grocer living on Chicago's South Side, was shot to death and police speculate that the killing may have been in revenge for the assassination of Senator Kennedy.

Second, I hope your search will uncover the causes of disrespect for law and order and of violent disruptions of public order by individuals and groups.

Third, I hope your search will lead to sensible and practical actions to control or prevent these outbreaks of violence.

#### Questions to Consider

Here are some of the questions I hope you will consider:

Is there something in the environment of American society or the structure of our institutions that causes disrespect for the law, contempt for the rights of others, and incidents of violence? If there is, how can we correct it?

Has permissiveness toward extreme behavior in our society encouraged an increase of violence?

Why do some individuals and groups reject the peaceful political and institutional processes of change in favor of violent means?

Are the seeds of violence nurtured through the public's airwaves, the screens of neighborhood theaters, the news media, and other forms of communication that reach the family and our young? I am asking the heads of the radio and television networks and the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission to cooperate wholeheartedly with you.

Is violence a contagious phenomenon? To the extent that it is, are there ways we can reduce the contagion?

What is the relationship between mass disruption of public order and individual acts of violence?

What is the relationship between mental derangement and violence — remembering that half our hospital beds are occupied by the mentally ill?

#### Practical Steps Sought

Does the democratic process which stresses exchanges of ideas permit less physical contact with masses of people—as a matter of security against the deranged individual and obsessed fanatic?

To the extent we can identify the basic causes of violence and disrespect for the law, what practical steps can and should be taken to eliminate them?

Can our society any longer tolerate the widespread possession of deadly firearms by private citizens?

What—beyond firm and effective Federal and state gun control laws which are

so desperately needed—can be done to give further protection to public leaders and private citizens?

How can the Government at all levels, the churches, schools and parents help to dispel the forces that lead to violence?

#### Scope of Inquiry

These are some of the questions that are on the minds of Americans today. But I must leave to you the task of defining precisely the scope and boundaries of your inquiry. For you will be venturing into uncharted ground.

Some of the questions I have asked and the matters you look into may be beyond the frontiers of man's knowledge. Nevertheless, I urge you to go as far as man's knowledge takes you.

Even where basic causes are beyond the knowledge and control of man, you may still be able to propose actions and laws and institutions that can limit the opportunities for violence by individuals and groups. For as I said on Friday:

"Two million guns were sold in the United States last year. Far too many were bought by the demented, the deranged, the hardened criminal and the convict, the addict, and the alcoholic. We cannot expect these irresponsible people to be prudent in their protection of us, but we can expect the Congress to protect us from them. . . ."

"I have spoken before of the terrible toll inflicted on our people by firearms: 750,000 Americans dead since the turn of the century—this is far more than have died at the hands of our enemies in all the wars we have fought. . . ."

"Each year, in this country, guns are involved in more than 6,500 murders. This compares with 30 in England, 99 in Canada, 68 in West Germany, and 37 in Japan. Forty-four aggravated assaults are committed with guns in America each year. 50,000 robberies are committed with guns in America each year."

### Search Must Be Made

The truths you seek will yield stubbornly to search. But that search must be made. And it must be started now.

Your work should help us move toward the day when hatred and violence will have no sway in the affairs of men. Since violence is an international phenomenon, your work will be a service not only to your countrymen, but to the world.

The agony of these past days lies heavy on the hearts of the American people.

But let us all now have the will and the purpose to forge our sorrow into a constructive force for public order and progress, justice and compassion. This is the spirit that has sustained the nation in all the years of our history.

It is the spirit, I believe, that can see us emerge from this hour of sorrow—a stronger and a more unified people.