Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for a degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter now, including display on the World Wide Web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis.

Martin Pimentel April 14, 2020

Det(riot)ers: The Rise and Fall of the Detroit Rumor Control Center, 1967-1970

by

Martin Pimentel

Dr. Jason Morgan Ward
Adviser

Department of History

Dr. Jason Morgan Ward

Adviser

Dr. Joseph Crespino

Committee Member

Dr. Andra Gillespie

Committee Member

2019

Det(riot)ers: The Rise and Fall of the Detroit Rumor Control Center, 1967-1970

By

Martin Pimentel

Dr. Jason Morgan Ward

Adviser

An abstract of
a thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Department of History

2019

Abstract

Det(riot)ers: The Rise and Fall of the Detroit Rumor Control Center, 1967-1970
By Martin Pimentel

For American historians, the riots accompanying the long, hot summers of 1967 and 1968 highlighted the nation's failure to meaningfully improve the day-to-day lives of black Americans. However, the historical literature on this period has consistently overlooked the development of a novel form of urban surveillance—the rumor control center—as a consequence of these riots. The social scientific literature that exists on the subject likewise fails to identify the historically contingent nature of these centers. Correspondingly, this paper seeks to establish a historical framework for the evaluation of rumor control centers by examining the case study of Detroit's center. I ultimately make two conclusions about the Detroit rumor control center. First, the center implicates not only the historical importance of the 1967 riots, but also the significance of civil rights and law enforcement agencies like the Community Relations Service and Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. Second, Detroit's unique history contributed to the trajectory of both the center's rapid ascendancy and its precipitous decline. Ultimately, this paper finds the Detroit rumor control center to be a unique case meriting further comparative study.

Det(riot)ers: The Rise and Fall of the Detroit Rumor Control Center, 1967-1970

By

Martin Pimentel

Dr. Jason Morgan Ward

Adviser

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Department of History

2019

Acknowledgements

Of the many people to whom I owe thanks for this project, no one was more instrumental than my advisor Dr. Jason Morgan Ward. From the first moment that I walked into your office with a half-baked idea for a research project, you have guided and shaped that raw idea into what it is today. This thesis is as much a reflection of your hard work and infinite patience as it is my own. I would also like to thank my other two committee members, Dr. Joseph Crespino and Dr. Andra Gillespie for their contributions to this work. Your insightful comments and questions played an invaluable role in framing and refining this thesis. Moreover, your willingness to make the time for me despite the extraordinary circumstances we found ourselves in at the end of this year merit more gratitude than I can express in words.

I also owe the Department of History and Emory College a debt of gratitude for making this research possible. I could never have conducted the archival work that underpins this thesis without the generous grants from the History Department's James Roark Prize and the Undergraduate Research Program's SIRE scholarship. I would particularly like to thank the History Department as a whole for its support during my four years at Emory. From my impossibly hardworking and thoughtful major advisor Dr. Judith Miller, who originally introduced me to Dr. Ward as a possible thesis advisor, to the unflappable Becky Herring and Lakesia Hayes, you all have made the world go 'round these past years.

This thesis was also the product of the Bill and Carol Fox Center for Humanistic Inquiry. I would like to thank Keith Anthony, Collette Barlow, Amy Erbil, and the rest of the center for their support of my research—your commitment to fostering a tight-knit and collaborative community of scholars is unparalleled.

I would also like to extend a tremendous thank you to the librarians, archivists, and staff at the Walter P. Reuther Library and the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library. You all made the Herculean task of sifting through infinite boxes of papers seem mundane, and I am confident that I could not have found the most critical elements of this thesis without your help. It was truly inspiring to work in two of the most professional archives in the country.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family for their support during this process. To my friends, you will be relieved to know that I can stop bothering you with talk about rumors and obscure Detroit politics (for now). To my parents, I am happy to report that I did in fact learn something in my time here! The sacrifices you made to get me to this point do not and have never gone unnoticed. The following pages are for you.

Martin Pimentel
April 14, 2020
Atlanta, Georgia

Table of Contents

Table of Contents

Introduction

The riot began in the early morning on July 23, 1967. Around 3:30 a.m., the Detroit police raided a so-called "blind pig"—the colloquial name for an establishment that illegally serves alcohol. These raids were relatively commonplace, as the Detroit Police Department conducted 76 such operations in 1966 alone.[1] A patrolman successfully infiltrated the blind pig and purchased alcohol around 3:00 a.m., after which he called in to the station to request a raid of the building. The police successfully conducted the operation and loaded patrons into squad cars. At this point, eight to ten police cars were at the scene, while a crowd of observers gathered outside. Soon, onlookers began throwing bottles at the cars, breaking one police officer's rear window.[2] By approximately 4:40 a.m. senior police officials ordered the police cars out of the area, a common de-escalation tactic reflecting the officers' concern that the incident had the potential to escalate if they remained targets in the area.[3]

In this case, the situation continued to escalate even in the squad cars' absence. The first riot-related police dispatch came in at 8:01 a.m., reporting looting a few blocks away from the blind pig. Reports of looting quickly proliferated in these early morning hours, followed closely by requests for assistance from police officers on the streets.[4] Mobs of people completely packed the streets, in some places for several consecutive blocks, in areas near the blind pig.[5] By 5:25 p.m., the city called in a contingent of the Michigan National Guardsmen to

---

[1] "The Detroit Police Department and the Detroit Civil Disorder," Compiled by Albert Callewaert and Arthur Yim: Mayor's Inspection Team, December 1967, Jerome P. Cavanagh Papers, Box 407, Folder 5, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, 17.
[2] Ibid., 20.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., 24.
[5] Ibid., 28.

contain the situation.[6] At this point, President Lyndon B. Johnson was notified of the evolving situation in Detroit.[7] By Monday, July 24, the disorder had spread throughout the city, and at 10:46 a.m. George W. Romney, the governor of Michigan, dispatched a telegram to President Lyndon B. Johnson requesting the use of federal troops to quell what at this point was a full-scale riot.[8]

However, two factors contributed to a delay in troop deployment until July 25. First, Attorney General Ramsey Clark was apparently unfamiliar with the law governing federal interventions in local civil disorders.[9] Second, Johnson suspected that Governor Romney wanted to call in federal troops to divert bad publicity onto Johnson instead of himself. Knowing that inaction was not an option, but hesitant to deploy troops to the riot zone, Johnson decided to station them at Selfridge Field, near Detroit, until a "trusted presidential emissary" deemed it necessary to send them into the city.[10] Johnson correspondingly airlifted a 2,400-man brigade from the 82nd Airborne and a 2,400-man brigade from the 101st Airborne to Selfridge by 2 p.m. on July 24, where an additional 1,500 paratroopers joined them three hours later. He then selected Cyrus Vance, who had just resigned as deputy Secretary of Defense, to conduct the on-site assessment.[11] While initially hesitant to affirm the need for troops, Vance finally recommended the commitment of troops to the city by 11 p.m. on July 24. At the same time, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover reported to Johnson that "they have lost all control in

---

[6] Ibid., 38.
[7] "The Detroit Riots Chronology," undated, Office Files of James C. Gaither, Box 43, "Detroit Riots," The Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas, 2.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1989): 203.
[10] Ibid., 208.
[11] Ibid., 209.

Detroit."[12] At midnight, Johnson publicly announced the deployment of federal troops in Detroit, and paratroopers moved into the city two hours later.[13]

The delay in action proved costly. Violence in the city did not begin to taper down until July 27, in what was referred to as "the first day of real peace" since July 23. The State Police began to leave Detroit on the 27th, while Johnson phased out federal troops between July 28 and August 2. Ultimately, it took the combined efforts of seventeen thousand men from the army, Michigan National Guard, State Police, and Detroit Police to quell the Detroit riot.[14] The Detroit Fire Department responded to 1,617 alarms from July 23-29, for an average of 231 per day.[15] They also had to withdraw from the scenes of 283 fires after attacks with projectiles and occasionally even firearms.[16] During these days, rioters looted, burned, or destroyed 2,509 stores, including grocery stores, laundries, department stores, liquor stores, bars, drugstores, and furniture stores; about 20% of these attacked buildings were damaged beyond repair.[17] The riot resulted in approximately $75 million in uninsured property damage and led to widespread, long-term cancellations of insurance coverage in riot areas.[18] The cost to the city, the state of Michigan, and the federal government was far greater: the city of Detroit estimated the costs of the riot to the city at $11.6 million; the state of Michigan estimated its costs at approximately $2 million between lost sales and gas taxes and the deployment of the National Guard; the federal government for its part incurred roughly $2.5 million in costs.[19]

---

[12] Ibid., 213.
[13] "The Detroit Riots Chronology," 5.
[14] Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 232-3.
[15] Ibid., 294.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., 296, 298.
[19] Ibid., 298.

The human cost also marked the 1967 Detroit riot as one of the most severe civil disorders in American history. The 1,189 riot-related injuries accounted for at least 10% of all people injured in the 341 riots across 265 American cities from 1963 to 1968. The 43 deaths in Detroit during these five days represented 20% of the 221 deaths in the same 341 riots. 30 people were killed by law enforcement personnel, and 33 of the dead were black.[20] As a result, the 1967 Detroit riot was widely perceived as the worst civil disorder in an American city in the twentieth century.[21]

Naturally, the riot spawned a wealth of literature on the subject. The federal government commissioned some of the most significant studies of riots during this period. In the wake of the series of severe riots which wracked the nation in 1967, of which Detroit was one of the most notable, Johnson appointed the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders to investigate the causes of the riots and prescribe potential solutions to prevent future riots.[22] The Community Relations Service—a subdivision of the Department of Justice—held several conferences to discuss various aspects of the 1967 riots. For example, one such conference, the Conference on Mass Media and Race Relations, discussed the role of the media in inflaming or mitigating tensions during riot events.[23]

Several scholars have also published academic histories of the 1967 Detroit riot, specifically, and the 1967 riots generally. One of the first histories of the 1967 Detroit riot

---

[20] Ibid., 299.
[21] Ibid., 291.
[22] See *The Kerner Report*, The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).
[23] See *Conference on Mass Media and Race Relations*, for the Community Relations Service of the United States Justice Department by the American Jewish Committee, October 17-18, 1967, Jerome P. Cavanagh Papers, Box 453, Folder 3, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit MI.

appeared in Hubert G. Locke's 1969 book *The Detroit Riot of 1967*.[24] In this book, Locke, an aide to the Detroit police commissioner during the riot, focuses largely on the immediate context of the riot. He traces the origins of the riot back to 1943 but is primarily concerned with a far narrower history of the riot. However, in his seminal book *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967*, the historian Sidney Fine takes a broader view of the riot.[25] Tracing the evolution of race relations in Detroit from the 1940s to the consequences of the 1967 riot in the 1970s and 1980s, *Violence in the Model City* remains the most comprehensive work on the 1967 Detroit riot to date. Other historians place the Detroit riot in the broader context of the waves of urban violence in 1967 and 1968. Two notable histories that place Detroit in this national context are Malcolm McLaughlin's *The Long, Hot Summer of 1967* and Clay Risen's *A Nation on Fire*.[26]

However, this scholarship has almost entirely elided the historical significance of rumors and, more specifically, the energetic efforts to reduce their proliferation during this period. As Jason Phillips notes in "The Grapevine Telegraph," historians' dismissal of this subject is unsurprising. The inclination of scholars' hindsight is to dismiss false rumors; they know that the Detroit riot was not a coordinated plot by civil rights leaders to overthrow society, so they reflexively ignore these inaccuracies. Those rumors that turn out to be correct are conversely assigned the status of news. Furthermore, it is difficult enough to untangle the roots of modern rumors or fake news, while doing so for rumors that are 50 years old is that much more

[24] Hubert G. Locke, *The Detroit Riot of 1967* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969).
[25] Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989).
[26] Malcolm McLaughlin, *The Long, Hot Summer of 1967* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014). Clay Risen, *A Nation on Fire: America in the Wake of the King Assassination*, (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2009).

difficult. As a result, it is hardly surprising that historians have generally avoided such a slippery and liminal subject.[27]

Nevertheless, the erasure of rumor from the history of the late 1960s is surprising for two reasons. First, policymakers and scholars from this riot period explicitly established the significance of rumors during the 1967 riots. Federal commissions studying the 1967 riots identified the uncontrolled spread of rumors as one of the most significant catalysts of mass violence during this period.[28] Moreover, scholars writing even as early as the immediate aftermath of the riots understood that rumors played a role in the riots. For example, one year after the Detroit riot, a pair of scholars at Michigan State University sent an unpublished paper entitled "On the Utility of Rumor," which explored the "harmful effects of rumors" during the riot, to the city of Detroit.[29] `Second, the manner in which officials combatted the dissemination of rumors during this period provides a unique means with which to study rumor. In the wake of the 1967 Detroit riot, a method of urban surveillance called a rumor control center proliferated across the country. These centers predominantly operated as call centers to which concerned citizens could report troubling rumors about potential riots. Moreover, these centers also often employed investigative units to verify these rumors and had varying degrees of ties with their local police departments, to whom they would report any credible rumors. These centers enable an unprecedented systematic analysis of rumor during this period. The archived records of the Detroit rumor control center contain a wealth of qualitative and

---

[27] Jason Phillips, "The Grape Vine Telegraph: Rumors and Confederate Persistence," *The Journal of Southern History* 72, no. 4 (Nov. 2006): 756.
[28] For example, see *The Kerner Report,* 326-7.
[29] Linda Davis and Clyde Morris, "On the Utility of Rumor," May 21, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 6, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

quantitative data, from written reports of rumors to call logs that recorded the number of incoming calls per day, categorized by the type of rumor that was reported. Access to this information thus presents the opportunity for unique interventions into the existing literature on both the history of the 1967 Detroit riot and in the literature of "rumor studies" more broadly.

While historians are hesitant to center rumors in their research, the social sciences have long understood their importance. Gordon Allport and Leo Postman's seminal book *The Psychology of Rumor* is widely considered the authoritative sociological text on rumor.[30] Other books have built on Allport and Postman's work by applying their theories of rumor dissemination specifically to the issue of racialized rumors. Foremost among these books are Gary Alan Fine and Patricia Turner's *Whispers on the Color Line: Rumor and Race in America* and Tamotsu Shibutani's *Improvised News: A Sociological Study of Rumor*.[31] Although less theoretical than both of these books, Howard Odum meticulously collects and analyzes rapidly spreading rumors of racial insurrection during World War II in his 1943 book *Race and Rumors of Race*.[32]

Similarly, social scientists are the only scholars to date to interrogate the development of rumor control centers. The sociologist Terry Ann Knopf has been the primary driver of research into rumor control centers. Her book *Rumors, Race, and Riots* is currently the only

---

[30] See Gordon W. Allport and Leo Postman, *The Psychology of Rumor*, (Henry Holt & Company: New York, 1947).
[31] Gary Alan Fine and Patricia A Turner, *Whispers on the Color Line: Rumor and Race in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). Tamotsu Shibutani, *Improvised News: A Sociological Study of Rumor* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966).
[32] Howard W. Odum, *Race and Rumors of Race: The American South in the Early Forties* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1943).

monograph that focuses exclusively on the concept of rumor control.[33] In this book, Knopf primarily strives to develop a formal model of rumor dissemination, which she then tested against the spread of racial rumors in the 1960s and the effect of rumor control centers in this model. However, as with the sociologists who preceded her, Knopf's focus on rumor from a social science perspective fails to interrogate how the nature of rumor dissemination is historically contingent. Likewise, much of the remaining literature is highly descriptive in scope. Both J. Rick Ponting's "Rumor Control Centers: Their Emergence and Operations" and Sanford Weinberg and Rich Eich's "Fighting Fire with Fire" merely describe the operational structure and capacity of various types of rumor control centers without exploring the history behind them.[34]

Stephen Young, Alasdair Pinkerton, and Klaus Dodds' "The Word on the Street: Rumor, 'Race,' and the Anticipation of Urban Unrest" comes the closest to a historical examination of rumor control. They trace the emergence of rumor control centers back to the mass outbreaks of racial violence between 1963 and 1967, while arguing that the preemptive and anticipatory logic that undergirded the Cold War was imported to address the domestic security of American cities.[35] While this approach is insightful, it does not account for the high degree of variation between rumor control centers. While the most common method of rumor control was the Detroit model of call centers hosted by the city government, there was a wide range of alternate models. Some cities did not use the city government, such as when Washington,

---

[33] Terry Ann Knopf, *Race and Rumors of Race* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1975).
[34] J. Rick Ponting, "Rumor Control Centers: Their Emergence and Operations," *American Behavioral Scientist* 16, no. 3 (1973): 391-401. Sanford B. Weinberg and Ritch K. Eich, "Fighting Fire with Fire: Establishment of a Rumor Control Center," *Communication Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (1978): 26-31.
[35] Stephen Young, Alasdair Pinkerton, and Klaus Dodds, "The Word on the Street: Rumor, 'Race,' and the Anticipation of Urban Unrest," *Political Geography* 38 (Jan. 2014): 57.

D.C.'s Urban League conducted a Community Alert Project in which young black members circulated through their neighborhoods and quashed provocative rumors. On the other extreme, the state of Indiana drafted a plan in 1970 to establish what was, in effect, a spy network in black communities. Different models of rumor control existed everywhere within this spectrum.[36] This diversity in rumor control methodology points to the inherently local nature of each rumor control center's history.

As a result, this paper understands the history of rumor control to be both a national and local history. America's long history of racial violence and the national threat posed by the widespread, damaging, and unpredictable outbursts of collective violence in the 1960s forced the nation to turn to new methods of riot prevention. Detroit's rapid evolution into the national face of rumor control, on the other hand, was the direct result of its specific history of racial violence. And, perhaps more significantly, the rapid decline of Detroit's rumor control center can only be explained through this local context. Chapter 1 will explore the national origins of rumor control, specifically with regards to the history of race riots in the 20th century and the role of the civil rights movement in developing the governmental institutions necessary to support rumor control in the late 1960s. Chapter 2 will examine the specific local factors that contributed to Detroit's embrace of this novel means of urban surveillance in 1968. Chapter 3 will explain the unique circumstances that led to the rapid decline of Detroit's rumor control center by 1970.

[36] Terry Ann Knopf, "Beating the Rumors: An Evaluation of Rumor Control Centers," *Policy Analysis* 1, no. 4 (Fall 1975): 602-3.

Origins of the Long, Hot Summer

Racial violence was supposed to be a Southern phenomenon. Perhaps this notion was due to the fact that the epitome of antiblack violence in America—lynchings—were indeed highly concentrated in the South. 79% of all lynching happened in southern states: from 1882-1968, Mississippi had the highest number of lynchings with 581, followed by Georgia with 531 and Texas with 493.[37] Correspondingly, scholars of racial violence in mid-20th century America tended to focus on the South. Some scholars have pointed to the South's agrarian economy as a reason why racial violence was worse in that region than in the North. As Stewart Tolnay and E.M. Beck argue in *A Festival of Violence*, critical labor shortages in the South resulting from high casualties during the Civil War, in addition to former slaves' newfound freedom, led to dramatically changed labor dynamics. As a result, "southern statehouses passed a series of measures, known as the 'Black Codes,' that were aimed at regaining control over the black labor force."[38] These measures included outlawing freedmen from having any occupation besides farmer or servant absent exorbitant taxes and imposing strict contract regulations on freedmen. When major events like World War II or the passage of the Civil Rights Act threatened to change this carefully calibrated racial hierarchy by expanding labor opportunities for southern blacks, lynchings often followed.[39]

In addition to studies of racial violence, even studies of *rumors* of racial violence often maintained a southern-centric focus. For example, Howard Odum's seminal work *Race and*

[37] "History of Lynchings," *NAACP*, https://www.naacp.org/history-of-lynchings/.
[38] Stewart Emory Tolnay and E.M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992): 4.
[39] Ibid., 4-5.

Rumors of Race, which examined rumors of racial insurrection in the 1940s, concentrated overwhelmingly on core Southern cities such as Charleston, Memphis, and New Orleans.[40] To be sure, Odum acknowledged that "most of these new patterns of behavior were the inevitable results of trends in all phases of American and world conditions," including the North.[41] Nevertheless, Odum argued that "without an understanding of the South, the Nation just simply couldn't understand what it was all about."[42] Published in 1943, Odum mobilized his research to convince the relatively more progressive northern states that civil rights activists were in fact pushing the South towards a race war. As a result, *Race and Rumors of Race* offers an exemplary insight into the southern-centric approach of many scholars prior to 1944.

However, discussions of racial violence, unfair employment practices, and the broader state of race relations in America became nationalized in 1943. The first significant event—the 1943 Detroit race riot—began on the evening of June 20 with reports of fights between youths at Belle Isle Park. Soon, conflicting rumors circulated that either a white or black mother and her baby had been thrown off a bridge.[43] The subsequent riot—exacerbated by persistent rumors of racial attacks in black and white communities—lasted until June 22. By the time 6,000 federal troops suppressed the riot, 34 people had been killed, 433 were wounded, and rioters had committed approximately $2 million in property damage (equivalent to roughly $27.5 million in 2015 dollars), primarily in the poorest neighborhood of Paradise Valley.[44]

---

[40] See Odum, *Race and Rumors of Race*.
[41] Ibid., 39.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Janet L. Langois, "The Belle Isle Bridge Incident: Legend Dialectic and Semiotic System in the 1943 Detroit Race Riots," *The Journal of American Folklore* 96, no. 380 (Apr.-Jun. 1983): 185.
[44] Dominic J. Capeci Jr. and Martha Wilkerson, "The Detroit Rioters of 1943: A Reinterpretation," *Michigan Historical Review* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 53.

Indeed, much of this violence was concentrated in black neighborhoods, as 25 of the 34 killed were black, 75% of the wounded were black, and much of the rioting occurred in black neighborhoods.[45] Nevertheless, many city and state officials publicly blamed "Negro hoodlums" for instigating the violence in the immediate aftermath of the riot.[46]

Several independent studies identified longstanding structural grievances as the root cause of the 1943 Detroit riot. A report by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), published in July 1943, argues that a shortage of affordable housing, employment discrimination, and police brutality facilitated by a lack of black representation in the police department were the real causes behind the riot.[47] Later studies have also corroborated the NAACP's conclusions. In his seminal book *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, Thomas Sugrue similarly identifies discrimination in public housing, employment discrimination, and industrial decline as root causes of the racial violence in Detroit in 1943.[48] Ultimately, these studies helped to reframe the conversation about racial violence in the United States in two ways. First, they identified root causes of racial violence that were commonly associated with northern cities. Whereas scholars like Tolnay and Beck associated Southern lynchings with agrarian labor tensions, the identification of deindustrialization and public housing as causal factors in the Detriot riot extended the scope of racial violence from Southern plantation economics to a national phenomenon.[49] Second, the scale of the 1943 Detroit riot offered a

---

[45] Ibid., 53-54.
[46] For example, see Steve Babson, *Working Detroit: The Making of a Union Town* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986): 119.
[47] Walter White and Thurgood Marshall, *What Caused the Detroit Riot?: An Analysis,* (New York: NAACP, 1943).
[48] Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).
[49] For a national account of segregation and racial tension in the North, see Thomas Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North*, (New York: Random House, 2008).

dramatic and concrete example of the devastating consequences that could result from a failure to address longstanding racial grievances. The series of other race riots that followed the Detroit riot further drove home this lesson. The most significant of these riots occurred in New York in what became known as the Harlem uprising of 1943. Between Detroit and New York, two of the most notable northern cities experienced large race riots that highlighted the heightened racial tensions in the North in addition to the South.

The civil rights movement emerged out of this nationwide tension. In 1946, President Truman appointed a Committee on Civil Rights that, in a final report entitled *To Secure These Rights*, recommended "the elimination of segregation based on race, color, creed, or national origin, from American life."[50] Of course, this recommendation would have stalled without the development of a coordinated legal apparatus and grassroots mobilization in black communities to fight segregation. In June 1953, black activists initiated a systematic boycott against the segregated buses in Baton Rouge that successfully mobilized thousands of community members.[51] The leader of this protest, Reverend T. J. Jemison, then exported his strategy of nonviolent protest to other cities, including to Montgomery in 1955 for the famous Montgomery bus boycott with Martin Luther King, Jr.[52] While King and other community leaders mobilized grassroots resistance to segregation, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) capitalized on the recommendations in *To Secure These Rights* by advancing a series of lawsuits aimed at overthrowing the *Plessy* doctrine of

---

[50] *To Secure These Rights: Final Report of the President's Committee on Civil Rights*, pg. 166, https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/to-secure-these-rights#139.
[51] Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*, (New York: The Free Press, 1984): 18-19.
[52] Ibid., 25.

separate but equal. These efforts culminated in the Supreme Court's unanimous 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* that accepted the NAACP's argument that separate schools are inherently unequal.[53]

However, progress did not come without resistance. The formation of the White Citizens Council in 1954 in response to the Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* and the bombings of black churches and civil rights leaders' homes in response to sit-ins and freedom rides in the 1950s and 1960s illustrated this point clearly enough. As a result, when President Lyndon B. Johnson worked to push the Civil Rights Act of 1964 through Congress, he understood the potential resistance he faced from not only members of Congress, but also from white extremists. The Civil Rights Act proposed dramatic changes to the very structure of American society by declaring employment discrimination illegal and establishing the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, outlawing segregation in publicly supported facilities and establishments serving the general public, and strengthening protections for voting and educational equality.[54] But dramatic change also offered the possibility of dramatic resistance, and the hospitalization of 19 blacks by 800 whites at a civil rights demonstration in Florida just weeks before Congress passed the Civil Rights Act hammered that lesson home. Johnson witnessed these events and realized that, particularly because he was entering an election year, he had to avoid ordering federal troops to take action against Southern resistance at all costs.[55]

---

[53] August Meier and John H. Bracey, Jr., "The NAACP as a Reform Movement, 1909-1965: 'To Reach the Conscience of America,'" *The Journal of Southern History* 59, no. 1 (Feb. 1993): 25.
[54] Bertram Levine, *Resolving Racial Conflict: The Community Relations Service and Civil Rights, 1964-1989*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005): 4.
[55] Ibid., 4-5.

The concept of a federal agency to mediate racial conflict grew out of this uncertainty regarding Southern violence. Johnson first envisioned the program as a senator while he debated the Civil Rights Act of 1957 in Congress.[56] While policymakers rejected the proposal at the time, Johnson actively campaigned for the creation of this program in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and this time he received no resistance to the idea.[57] Ultimately, Title X of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 established the Community Relations Service (CRS) as part of the Commerce Department and authorized it to assist "communities and persons therein in resolving disputes, disagreements, or difficulties relating to allegations of discriminatory practices based on race, color, or national origin."[58] In practice, the CRS deployed task forces to communities that requested assistance, where federal "conciliators" would attempt to defuse potentially violent situations. This process most frequently involved encouraging business and civic leaders to drum up popular support on behalf of the complainant, although conciliators occasionally directly intervened in protests or other local events if there was an immediate risk of violence.[59] The CRS also devoted much of its time to mediating thousands of disputes between minorities and the police.[60]

In the context of the burgeoning civil rights movement, Lyndon B. Johnson also emerged with his conception of the Great Society and the War on Poverty. Johnson's Great Society intended to build on President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Depression-era New Deal programs by

---

[56] Ibid., 6.
[57] Ibid., 10-12.
[58] 42 USC Chapter 21, Sub-Chapter VIII: Community Relations Service, §200g-1: Functions of Service, https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title42/chapter21/subchapter8&edition=prelim.
[59] For example, see the case studies of Hilton Head, South Carolina and Jonesboro, Louisiana in Levine, *Resolving Racial Conflict*, 27-29.
[60] Levine, *Resolving Racial Conflict*, 125.

focusing on three key elements of America during the 1960s: the "decaying cities," an eroding physical environment, and education.[61] Johnson's Great Society also drew heavily from his predecessor Kennedy's War on Poverty initiative.[62] However, until the mid-1960s, most government officials and even civil rights leaders believed that the key to solving the issue of poverty was through civil rights legislation rather than economic reforms.[63] As a result, the early Johnson administration believed the poverty problem to be fundamentally a race problem—if progress could be made on civil rights, then many of the other elements of the Great Society would follow. Unsurprisingly, the Johnson administration began to invest heavily in social programs for cities. Detroit, the city that in many ways became the face of the Great Society for its great strides in increasing racial equality relative to other cities, received more than $230 million from the federal government between 1962 and 1967.[64]

However, the summer of 1967 demanded the racial mediation of the CRS rather than the long-term, structural reforms of the Great Society. It was also in this summer that the CRS experienced its greatest challenge—and failure. Violent protests and campus confrontations marred the preceding summers, but these events were relatively contained in nature compared to the long, hot summer of 1967.[65] Public officials reported 164 riots—referred to as "civil disorders"—in the first nine months of 1967 alone. Of these disorders, the federal government classified 8 as major with respect to their violence and damage, 33 as serious but not major,

---

[61] Irwin Unger, *The Best of Intentions: The Triumphs and Failures of the Great Society Under Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon*, (New York: Doubleday, 1996): 16-17.
[62] Ibid., 49.
[63] Ibid., 50.
[64] Fine, *Violence in the Model City,* 18.
[65] For an overview of racial violence leading up to the riots of 1967, see Malcolm McLaughlin, *The Long Hot Summer of 1967* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).

and 123 as relatively minor.[66] However, even the minor disorders contributed to a growing sense of a serious national crisis, as they reflected the fact that no city, whether northern or southern, was immune from the violence.[67] As one of the leading officials of the CRS noted, "the infant Community Relations Service, overwhelmed by its assignment to ease racial violence in the South, wanted no part of [the disorders]."[68] However, as the newly designated program for addressing racial tension, the CRS inevitably had to address the spread of disorders in some fashion. During the riot control phase, the CRS eventually came to play a role coordinating the involvement of minority communities' efforts to stem the immediate violence. More frequently, however, the CRS's role was confined to resolving grievances in the wake of the disorder.

Of all the disorders during this year, the riot in Detroit stood out from the rest across wide range of metrics. While the number of people injured during the riot is difficult to accurately estimate, the number of injured almost certainly exceeded 1,000, accounting for at least 10% of all injured persons in the 341 riots across the country from 1963 to 1968.[69] Moreover, the 43 deaths during the Detroit riot represented more than half of the 83 deaths from all 164 civil disturbances that occurred across the country during the first nine months of 1967 and 20% of the 221 deaths in the 341 disorders from 1963 to 1968.[70] In addition to the human costs of the riot, there were massive financial costs. Rioters looted, burned, or otherwise destroyed over 2,509 stores over the course of the riot.[71] The cost of the damages is

---

[66] *The Kerner Report*, 6.
[67] McLaughlin, *The Long Hot Summer,* 7.
[68] Levin, *Resolving Racial Conflict*, 104.
[69] Fine, *Violence in the Model City,* 299.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid., 291.

difficult to precisely quantify, but the insured and uninsured losses for businesses in the riot area were likely around $100 million. The effects of the riot on insurance also extended well beyond the immediate consequences of the riot as many insurance companies canceled policies in the riot areas.[72]

In the wake of the devastation resulting from these riots, President Johnson established the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders—colloquially known as the Kerner Commission—on July 29, 1967. The commission, established pursuant to Executive Order 11365, had two primary tasks: first, to investigate "the origins of the recent major civil disorders in our cities, including the basic causes and factors leading to such disorders," and second, to recommend "the development of methods and techniques for averting or controlling such disorders."[73] The final report of the Kerner Commission, published in 1968, ultimately identified eight basic causes of the 1967 riots: pervasive discrimination in education, employment, and housing; white exodus from the cities and black in-migration, resulting in deteriorating facilities and poor living conditions; the development of black ghettos; the failure of judicial and legislative civil rights victories to meaningfully change the everyday lives of black Americans; feelings of powerlessness leading to the increasing radicalization of blacks and the rise of the Black Power movement; a climate of approval of violence created by both white terrorism and black militancy; the replacement of apathy and submission with racial pride; and police abuse and repression.[74]

---

[72] Ibid., 296.

[73] "Executive Order 11365—Establishing a National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders," accessed online at *The American Presidency Project*, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/306428.

[74] *The Kerner Report*, 10-11.

In addition to these eight causes, the final report of the Kerner Commission identified 12 grievances that contributed to a riotous climate. The commission subdivided these grievances into three levels of relative intensity, reflecting the degree of their contribution to the riots. The first level of intensity included police practices, unemployment and underemployment, and inadequate housing. The second level of intensity included inadequate education, poor recreational facilities and programs, and the ineffectiveness of the political structure and grievance mechanisms. The third level of intensity included disrespectful white attitudes, discriminatory justice systems, inadequate federal programs, inadequate municipal services, discriminatory consumer and credit practices, and inadequate welfare programs.[75] Notably, all of these causes can be categorized as "structural" factors in the riots. In other words, they represent long-term trends that, as they built over time, created a climate susceptible to major riots. This long-term, structural way of thinking about the events leading up to the riots was in line with the policies of Johnson's Great Society, which placed an emphasis on resolving structural issues like poverty and inequality.

Certainly, scholars of the 1967 riots do not dispute that structural factors like the ones identified by the Kerner Commission were likely the root cause of the violence. However, the final report of the commission also delved into five possible proximate causes of the riots: crowded living conditions, worsened by the summer heat; unoccupied youths on the streets; hostility to police; delay in police response; and persistent rumors and inadequate information.[76] The role of police in inflaming community tension was one of the most

[75] Ibid., 8.
[76] *The Kerner Report*, 326.

commonly referenced proximate causes identified by the commission. The final report of the Kerner Commission cites "deep hostility between police and ghetto communities as a primary cause of the disorders surveyed by the Commission."[77] Much of the academic literature on riots similarly focuses on the relationship between police and rioting.[78] Scholars have also studied the role of youths in the riots, and the use of Great Society programs like Youth Opportunity Centers to keep them off the streets in the summer months, at length.[79]

The Kerner Commission's emphasis on the role of rumor in fomenting violence has received far less scholarly attention. The commission found that "rumors significantly aggravated tension and disorder in more than 65 percent of the disorders studied by the Commission."[80] Sometimes "rumor served as a spark which turned an incident into a disorder," while other times rumors simply exacerbated existing violence.[81] In either instance, it was clear to the commission that cities had to take steps to stop the spread of potentially dangerous rumors. Specifically, the commission advised cities to "establish machinery for neutralizing rumors" and "create special rumor details to collect, evaluate, and dispel rumors that may lead to a civil disorder."[82] But what would this machinery look like? To answer this question, the Kerner Commission drew on the proven successes of a fledgling program based in Chicago's Human Relations Department: the Chicago Rumor Central. The Rumor Central, according to the

---

[77] *The Kerner Report*, 301.
[78] For example, see Cathy Lisa Schneider, *Police Power and Race Riots: Urban Unrest in Paris and New York*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014). For an analysis of police tactics in the 1967 riots, see also Albert Bergesen, "Race Riots of 1967: An Analysis of Police Violence in Detroit and Newark," *Journal of Black Studies* 12, no. 3 (1982): 261-274, and Anthony Daniel Perez, Kimberly M. Berg, and Daniel J. Myers, "Police and Riots, 1967-1969," *Journal of Black Studies* 34, no. 2 (2003): 153-182.
[79] For example, see Elizabeth Hinton, "'A War within Our Own Boundaries': Lyndon Johnson's Great Society and the Rise of the Carceral State," *Journal of American History* 102, no. 1 (June 2015): 100-112.
[80] *The Kerner Report*, 327.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid., 19.

Kerner Commission, was "an innovative method" for collecting, evaluating, and dispelling rumors.[83] In a supplement to the final report on controlling disorders, the commission discusses how the Rumor Central operated in recent moments of violence to quell rumors.[84]

Other federal agencies took an interest in rumors and rumor control. In a report on the control and prevention of riots, published in April 1967, FBI Director John Edgar Hoover also raised the role of rumors in riots. According to Hoover, "a rumor can often be the spark that sets of the explosion. It is circulated rapidly and, through distortion, it grows in its ugliness at each recitation. Rumors are also significant during the actual rioting by helping to sustain the excitement."[85] Hoover's statement aligns closely with the Kerner Commission's belief that rumors could be the spark that catalyzes a riot or a factor in their longevity. However, Hoover goes one step further, arguing that "in fact, some writers go so far as to state that no riot ever takes place without a build-up through rumor."[86]

This argument draws a far more explicitly deterministic causal link between rumors and riots than the Kerner Commission's final report does. However, the commission's praise of the Chicago Rumor Central was also fundamentally rooted in the belief that some causal link exists between the spread of rumors and the development of riots. Notably, both the Kerner Commission and the Hoover report both use the language of rumors as a spark to describe this causal relationship. This description may provide some insight into the authors that Hoover

---

[83] Ibid., 327.
[84] "Supplement on Control of Disorder," Part IV: Supplement and Appendices, Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, accessed through HeinOnline, 269.
[85] John Edgar Hoover, "Prevention and Control of Mobs and Riots," Federal Bureau of Investigations, Department of Justice, National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, Exhibits to Hearings, Aug. 1-Nov. 10, 1967, Series: (2), Index 1-14, Exhibit #1, the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, TX, pg. 25.
[86] Ibid.

references in his report. In 1966, the sociologist Tamotsu Shibutani published the seminal book *Improvised News: A Sociological Study of Rumor*. In a section on sustained collective tension, Shibutani argues that "after a succession of gradual changes in life conditions members of ethnic minorities…become increasingly dissatisfied with their lot, even when it is materially improved; they complain bitterly and demand immediate changes."[87] In this situation, which sounds markedly similar to the Kerner Commission's assessment of social tension prior to the riots, a rumor "strikes a spark that sets off already mobilized responses."[88] In other words, collective social tension creates an environment in which rumor can directly catalyze social violence like riots.

Notably, Shibutani's articulation of the role of violence in "sparking" social violence parallels that of Hoover and the Kerner Commission. All three explicitly describe rumors as sparks that can ignite the metaphorical flames of collective violence. Additionally, based on Hoover's acknowledgement that his understanding of the role of rumors in riots came from unspecified "authors," it seems likely that he was familiar with the contemporary work of Shibutani and his argument that rumors could be a causal element of riots during periods of social unrest. Because Hoover did not explicitly cite his quotations, scholars cannot know exactly who Hoover was quoting. But if, as his language suggests, Hoover was versed in the sociological literature on rumor, then it is highly likely that he was also familiar with the most well-known book on rumor studies: *The Psychology of Rumor* by Gordon Allport and Leo Postman. *The Psychology of Rumor* was one of the first studies to argue that rumors are a

[87] Shibutani, *Improvised News,* 47.
[88] Ibid., 49.

phenomenon that can be studied empirically and experimentally. In their book, Allport and Postman employed a "laboratory approach" to studying rumor that found that rates of rumor dissemination could be measured, its patterns mapped, and its impact on society predicted.[89] The logical consequence of this theory is the development of rumor control centers, which were predicated on the idea that sufficient knowledge of emergent rumors could inform officials about the location and time of probable riot events.

Hoover and the Kerner Commission's reliance on the sociological theory of rumor contributed to their support for rumor control efforts. However, this theory in and of itself is not sufficient to explain why cities preferred to implement rumor control centers instead of policies targeting the root causes of the riots as identified by the Kerner Commission. Understanding the decline in public support for Johnson's Great Society is a critical element in understanding why rumor control centers became a popular mechanism of riot prevention. There were primarily three reasons why the riots of 1967 poisoned the public support for Great Society programs. First, many white Americans resented black communities for rioting despite their supposed societal advancement. As one Oklahoma oil field worker argued to *Newsweek*, black people "asked for a better chance, but when they got it, it went to their heads."[90] Of course, as the Kerner Commission found, these better chances were in fact largely illusory. Nevertheless, this resentment began to fester in the wake of the riot.

Second, there was a sense that, because the Great Society programs failed to prevent the riots, they were not worth their exorbitant price tag. Some newspapers pointed out the

---

[89] Allport and Postman, *The Psychology of Rumor*. Specifically, see the chapters "An Experimental Approach," pg. 61, "The Basic Pattern of Distortion," pg. 134, and "Rumor and Society," pg. 159.
[90] *Newsweek,* August 21, 1967, cited in Unger, *The Best of Intentions,* 248.

contradiction that Detroit, the city to most wholeheartedly embrace the progressive reforms of the Great Society, also experienced the worst riot of the summer.[91] Representative George Mahon, the chairman of the House Appropriations Committee at the time, went even further, stating that "the problem is not one of more dollars, but of discipline. The more we have appropriated for these programs, the more violence we have had."[92] As Rep. Mahon's statement makes clear, appropriating large sums of federal dollars for urban areas prone to riots came to be perceived as rewarding the rioters, a fact that was not lost on President Johnson.[93]

Finally, the effective response to the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. appeared to offer empirical proof of rumor control as a method of riot prevention. Detroit began to set up its rumor control center in the beginning of 1968, and on Monday, March 11, it began operations and received its first call.[94] Newspapers in Detroit immediately publicized the new rumor control center. On March 16, one editorial blasted out the headline "Check Out Rumors at 963-9550 First," in an effort to inform the public as directly as possible how to contact the center.[95] Shortly afterward, the *Milwaukee Journal* declared that the "Rumor Center Seeks to

---

[91] For example, see Daniel P. Moynihan, "Where the American Liberals Went Wrong," *The Sunday Denver Post*, August 13, 1967, pg. 2, National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, Series: (29), Selected Substantive Letters Received by the Commission Before Publication of the Report, The Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas.

[92] Unger, *The Best of Intentions*, 249.

[93] Ibid., 249-250. According to Unger, Vice President Humphrey was reportedly berated by Johnson for offering to send federal antipoverty aid to pacify Newark, a move that would have been seen as linking administration policies to urban violence.

[94] "Rumor Calls CCR," April 17, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 8, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

[95] "Check Out Rumors at 963-9550 First," March 16, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 7, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

Keep Detroit Cool."[96] The center received a stunning 580 calls in its first five days open, while the police department received an additional 813 calls during the same span.[97] However, Detroit's rumor control center faced its first real test on April 4, 1968 when Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. Riots immediately broke out across the country that night and continued throughout the weekend; when the dust had settled, rioters had caused tens of millions of dollars in damage, thousands were injured or arrested, federal troops occupied Washington, Chicago, and Baltimore, and National Guardsmen had been dispatched to a dozen other cities.[98] However, Detroit—the site of the most significant riot of 1967—avoided any rioting. On the other hand, the city did handle 4,294 rumor calls from April 4 to April 7 in response to the King assassination.[99] Local news lauded the rumor control center's role in containing the mass of rumors over the weekend.[100] The Detroit Commission on Community Relations also pointed to the spike in rumor calls as evidence of the "relationship of events to rumors" and concluded that "a Rumor Control Center is absolutely vital to a community experiencing heightened social tension."[101]

The marked difference in outcome between the 1967 Detroit riot and Detroit in the wake of the King assassination appeared to empirically validate the viability of rumor control as

---

[96] "Rumor Center Seeks to Keep Detroit Cool," *The Milwaukee Journal*, March 31, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 8, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.
[97] "RUMOR CONTROL CENTER," April 17, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 8, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.
[98] Risen, *A Nation on Fire,* 4.
[99] "RUMOR CONTROL CENTER," April 17, 1968.
[100] "Local Rumor Control Center Handles 10,000 Calls," *The Michigan Chronicle*, July 20, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 8, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.
[101] "History and Purpose of Detroit's Rumor Control Center," memorandum from the Detroit Commission on Community Relations to Mayor's Offices. Found in Appendix IV to Community Relations Service, "Rumor Control Conference: Conference on 'The Value of Establishing Rumor Control Centers' Report," June 27-28, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 31, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI, pg. 6.

a method of riot prevention. As a result, it is unsurprising that local politicians were more inclined to embrace the Kerner Commission's recommendation to develop rumor control centers while forgoing broader policy changes linked to the Great Society. The federal government, particularly the Department of Justice, encouraged this trend after the publication of the final report of the commission. From June 27-28, 1968, the Community Relations Service, at this point moved from the Commerce Department to the Department of Justice, held a conference with city officials from across the country entitled "the Value of Establishing Rumor Control Centers." The conference consisted of 125 participants, representing 93 different cities, in addition to 14 CRS officials.[102] The report from the conference begins by citing the Kerner Commission's recommendation that cities establish rumor control centers as a justification for the conference.[103] The first day of the conference involved a presentation by the Director of the Chicago Commission on Human Relations and a tour of the Chicago Rumor Central.[104] The second day involved a series of presentations from city officials directing operating rumor control centers in Detroit, Denver, and Hartford. Operatives from rumor control centers in Atlanta, Dayton, Oklahoma City, Wichita, and Richmond, Indiana also made comments.[105]

The appendix to the report of the conference includes several instructional memoranda developed by cities with the most developed rumor control centers. One memorandum compiled by the Chicago Commission on Human Relations proudly touted the Kerner Commission's praise for the Rumor Central and included detailed information on setting up a

[102] Community Relations Service, "Rumor Control Conference," Directory of Conference Participants.
[103] Ibid., pg. 1.
[104] Ibid., conference program, pg. 1.
[105] Ibid., pg. 2-3.

rumor control center. The memo outlined five basic considerations for deploying a successful center: 1) publicizing the center's telephone number, primarily through print media; 2) obtaining the necessary physical equipment, including phone banks, maps of the city, and forms to appropriately log the calls; 3) hiring personnel, including phone, research, and field staff; 4) defining clear procedures for logging calls and responding to potential threats; and 5) developing systems of communication with the local police, fire departments, and sources of intelligence.[106]

Detroit also developed an instructional memorandum for the conference on establishing a rumor control center. The memorandum mimicked the substance of Chicago's memo almost identically.[107] Unsurprisingly, the active efforts by Chicago and Detroit to spread rumor control centers to other cities worked. While the exact number of rumor control centers around the country is unclear, a comprehensive study published in 1975 confirmed that at least 97 cities at the time had at least experimented with rumor control centers.[108] Moreover, 43 of the cities in the study attended the 1968 CRS conference on rumor control, indicating that over 46% of the cities represented at the conference ultimately acting on the CRS' recommendations.[109] These cities had no particular geographic concentration, spanning from Oregon to Texas and Georgia to New York.[110] Rumor control centers, it seems, were truly a national phenomenon.

---

[106] "Rumor Central: Memorandum to Mayors' Offices," Commission on Human Relations, City of Chicago, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 39, Walter P. Reuther Library, Detroit, MI.
[107] "Establishing a Rumor Control Center," memorandum from the Detroit Commission on Community Relations to mayors' offices, no date, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 39, Walter P. Reuther Library, Detroit, MI.
[108] Knopf, *Rumors, Race, and Riots*, 304
[109] For the list of conference participants, see Community Relations Service, "Rumor Control Conference," Directory of Conference Participants, pg. 1-9. For the full list of cities with rumor control centers by 1975, see Knopf, *Rumors, Race, and Riots,* Appendix G, pg. 355-364.
[110] Knopf, *Rumors, Race, and Riots,* Appendix G, pg. 355-364.

Notably, the CRS was not the only Department of Justice Agency tasked with studying and supporting rumor control centers. In 1970, the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA)—an agency within the Department of Justice—sent a request to the National Association of Police Community Relations Officers to conduct a nationwide study of rumor control centers in major cities.[111] The study, which surveyed 45 major cities accounting for 40% of the total population of the United States, primarily served to establish data on which cities had rumor control centers, their size, and how they operated.[112] The study does explicitly attempt to propose normative judgements about the efficacy of these centers. However, two elements of the report stand out. First, the author of the report states their surprise that a dozen cities, many of which experienced riots in 1967-1968, had not established rumor control centers. This surprise indicates that government officials implicitly supported rumor control, particularly for cities with a history of riots. Furthermore, this implicit bias in favor of rumor control becomes explicit in the conclusion of the report. While the report notes that a conclusion about the efficacy of rumor control could not be established because the survey did not evaluate the effectiveness of these centers, it nevertheless goes on to state that "overall, it is intuitively concluded that in times of urban tension and stress, in all probability, the establishment of an official 'Rumor Control' or Government Information Center is a worthwhile municipal endeavor."[113] In other words, the report manages to simultaneously state that the

[111] "Letter from Minoru Yasui to Mayor's Office," National Association of Police Community Relations Officers, May 1970, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 42, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.
[112] Minoru Yasui, "A Study of 'Rumor Control' or Information Centers in Major Cities of the United States," National Association of Police Community Relations Officers, June 30, 1970, pg. 1, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 43, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.
[113] Ibid., 5.

impossibility of evaluating rumor control's effectiveness while advocating for the establishment of rumor control centers in all major cities.

The federal government's support for rumor control is clear. Even before the concept had been fully developed, the creation of the CRS as the government's primary racial conflict resolution agency primed the Johnson administration to innovate new methods of riot prevention after the long, hot summers. The apparent effectiveness of Chicago's Rumor Central during the summer of 1967 and the Kerner Commission's praise of the institution led to national acclaim for the concept. Meanwhile, federal agencies from Hoover's FBI, the CRS, and the LEAA all played roles in either tacitly or substantively supporting the concept of rumor control. By the time that Detroit's fledgling rumor control center apparently contributed to the prevention of riots in 1968, rumor control had become a national phenomenon, spreading to every region of the country. However, even as the subject of rumor control became nationalized, the LEAA report illustrates how specific place remained important in the discussion of rumor control. Substantial operational differences existed between cities' rumor control centers. The government ran the centers in some cities, while volunteers ran centers in other cities; the relatively small city of Birmingham employed 120 people in its rumor control city while Boston employed 10 for a population 2.5 times greater than Birmingham's; and while commissions on community relations ran many of the centers, many others were headed by mayors' offices or police departments.[114]

Ultimately, two key conclusions can be drawn about the rise of rumor control in the United States. First, the rise of rumor control was a national phenomenon. The history of racial

[114] Ibid., Appendix I.

violence and race riots which generated the impetus for rumor control as a means of riot prevention was not unique to any one city. Neither were the effects of the civil rights movement, as activists and policymakers pushed forward policies such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that further increased the racial tension across the nation. The riots of 1967 and 1968 were likewise indiscriminate, striking cities in the North and South, from small cities to the largest metropolises. Unsurprisingly, the reaction to the riots was national as well. The CRS, itself a tool of the Civil Rights Act, was instrumental in organizing city officials into a national framework of rumor control. Through the conferences hosted by the federal government, city officials were able to collaborate and generate a common model of rumor control based on Chicago's Rumor Central. In one sense, therefore, the rise of rumor control is truly a national story.

However, the implementation of rumor control was also fundamentally local. The differences between the institutional and organizational structure of rumor control centers between cities—namely the number of staffers for the centers, their relationship to the city governments, their relationship to the police departments, and their methods of surveilling rumors—has been woefully under-covered in the literature on rumor control. The implementation of rumor control also varied in terms of time. The Chicago Rumor Central pioneered the modern concept of rumor control, while Detroit quickly implemented its own center modeled on the Rumor Central within a year of the Detroit riot. Other cities took years to develop their centers, while yet other cities never adopted rumor control methods. If a national history of the United States explains the proliferation of rumor control centers across

the country in the wake of the 1967 and 1968 riots, only a local history can explain the specific formulation and implementation of individual rumor control centers.

The Rise of the Detroit Rumor Control Center

While the concept of rumor control gained national popularity during 1967 and 1968, Detroit's unique history ideally positioned the city to lead this effort. Specifically, two elements of Detroit's racial history contributed to the city's quick embrace of rumor control. First, from Detroit's rumor-stoked race riot in 1943 to newspaper strikes in 1967 and 1968, Detroit continuously innovated in an effort to stave off the next riot. Programs intended to predict the time and place of future riots emerged after the 1943 riot and continuously evolved until the 1967 riot spurred a shift to rumor control. Second, the Detroit's local politics primed the city to wholeheartedly embrace rumor control as a method of riot prevention. Of the cities that embraced President Johnson's Great Society programs, Detroit was widely perceived to be the most successful at implementing policies aimed at reducing racial tension. When these safeguards apparently did little to curb one of the most severe riots in American history, Mayor Cavanagh and the public writ large were more likely to embrace a new form of riot prevention that did not require difficult, expensive, and systemic change. As a result of these factors, Detroit developed a rumor control center that quickly amassed thousands of calls per week in its initial weeks of operation, demonstrating its national preeminence in rumor control.

Several similarities between the 1943 Detroit race riot and the 1967 Detroit riot led the city of Detroit to investigate proto-rumor control methods two decades before the concept was popularized. The origins of the 1943 riot trace back as far as 1915, when migrating southern blacks began to compete with white Detroiters and European migrants for jobs, housing, and social status. The Great Depression intensified this tension as it forced unemployed white

workers to challenge black workers for jobs that had traditionally been "nigger work."[115] The influx of approximately 500,000 people in the early 1940s to meet the demand for wartime production only exacerbated this trend.[116] As a result, the city was primed for an isolated event to escalate into widespread violence. The event in question became known as the Belle Isle Bridge Incident. On Sunday, June 20, 1943, about 60,000 blacks and 40,000 whites were on the island of Belle Isle.[117] A group of black youths provoked isolated fights around the island throughout the afternoon, which escalated into a brawl on the Belle Isle Bridge. However, the incident did not devolve into a riot until participants and bystanders of the fight made their way to the Forest Club, where they spread the rumor that the white youths had thrown a black mother and her baby off the bridge. Black dancers at the club proceeded to run out of the building and stone nearby onlookers and policemen. At this point, the violence escalated to a full-blown riot. By June 22, the riot had killed 34 people, injured 433 people, caused approximately $2 million in property damage, and cost one million war production hours.[118]

As city officials surveyed Detroit after the 1943 riot, they began to develop new preventative measures against riots. Five days after the start of the riot, Detroit mayor Edward J. Jeffries Jr. appointed a 12-person committee dubbed the Detroit Interracial Committee (DIC) and tasked it with "calming the public mind, in assisting the restoration of good will between the races, and in preventing future riots."[119] In 1944, the DIC developed the Community Barometer to measure racial tension in the city. The DIC theorized that racial tension correlated

---

[115] Capeci and Wilkerson, "The Detroit Rioters of 1943," 50-51.
[116] Ibid., 52.
[117] Langois, "The Belle Isle Bridge Incident," 187.
[118] Capeci and Wilkerson, "The Detroit Rioters of 1943," 53.
[119] Alfred McClung Lee and Norman Daymond Humphrey, "The Interracial Committee of the City of Detroit," *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 19, no. 5 (Jan. 1946): 279, quoting the Detroit Interracial Committee.

with race riots, and that if they could accurately identify periods of heightened racial tension, city officials could deploy resources to prevent riots from breaking out before they even began.[120]

Even at the time, however, people perceived the DIC as a symbolic measure rather than a systemic solution to racial tension and riots in Detroit. Three years after the establishment of the DIC, sociologists Alfred Lee and Norman Humphrey criticized the committee for having no budget or staff and for its inability to follow through on many of its key objectives.[121] Moreover, the core pillars of racial division in Detroit remained in place throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Housing discrimination formed the first of these pillars. While southern black migrants brought with them a dream of economic security and property ownership that was all but entirely impossible even in the postbellum South, by the late 1940s they quickly realized that Detroit was hardly different. Because black workers were confined to the worst paying, least secure jobs, they often experienced significantly greater fiscal barriers to property ownership than their white counterparts. Furthermore, black families were systematically excluded from the private real estate market in much of the city and the surrounding suburbs by white landlords. With a limited number of housing complexes that allowed blacks, they were forced into overpriced rental housing that further exacerbated black economic struggles.[122]

Housing discrimination played a direct role in inflaming racial tensions in Detroit in the postwar period. In 1950, the Detroit Common Council proposed building a cooperative housing

---

[120] B. Whitney, "The Detroit Community Barometer," January 30, 1945, DCCR Collection, Series I, Box 9, Folder 14, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.
[121] Lee and Humphrey, "The Interracial Committee," 280-1.
[122] Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis,* 34.

project in traditionally white northwest Detroit. Even though only three of the fifty-four families in the proposed project were to be black, white residents in the community objected to the plan. Detroit's mayor ultimately fired a prominent black leader from the council over the stalled policy, resulting in protests from the black community. The mayor was only able to defuse the situation by asking for the resignation of the director of the DIC.[123] In 1953, Ordinance 736-E replaced the DIC altogether with the newly formed Detroit Commission on Community Relations (DCCR), which operated under the same mandate to make recommendations designed to improve race relations in the community.[124] However, this newly established body had no more success mitigating racial tension than the DIC had. While no full-scale riots occurred during this period, five major racial demonstrations by white picketers outside black homes resulted in serious incidents that had the potential for escalation.[125]

While segregation and protesting were not unique to the 1950s, the DCCR also had to contend with Detroit's rapid deindustrialization during this period: Murray Auto Body, Packard, and Studebaker all shut down between 1953 and 1957, Dodge Main cut its workforce by several thousand in the late 1950s, and the city experienced four major recessions between 1949 and 1960.[126] Moreover, this period marked the permanent closure of many automotive plants and decline in Detroit's employment opportunities. The city never fully recovered. Diminishing labor opportunities exacerbated the vicious cycle of housing discrimination and employment discrimination, which in turn heightened the racial tension pervading the city of Detroit.

---

[123] Joe T. Darden and Richard W. Thomas, *Detroit: Race Riots, Racial Conflicts, and the Efforts to Bridge the Racial Divide* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013): 5-6.
[124] United States Commission on Civil Rights, *Hearings Before the United States Commission on Civil Rights* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1960): 32.
[125] Darden and Thomas, *Detroit*, 6.
[126] Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 126.

However, the early 1960s marked a shift in Detroit's community relations strategy. The most significant catalyst of this change was the election of Jerome P. Cavanagh as the mayor of Detroit. Cavanagh was elected in 1962 when he defeated incumbent mayor Louis C. Miriani, before quickly establishing himself as a rising star in the national wing of the Democratic Party. In 1963, the U.S. Junior Chamber of Commerce declared Cavanagh to be one of the nation's ten most "Outstanding Young Men." Life magazine went on to describe him as part of the "take-over" generation and one of the 100 most important young men in the country. In addition to making headlines, Cavanagh also rapidly established himself on a series of national public policy commissions. In 1962, President Kennedy appointed him to the National Advisory Committee on Area Redevelopment. In 1964, he was appointed to the National Citizen's Committee for Community Relations. He also became the first person to ever serve simultaneous terms as President of the National League of Cities and the U.S. Conference of Mayors.[127]

Cavanagh gained this national acclaim for his implementation of progressive policies in Detroit designed to alleviate many of the systemic concerns raised by the 1943 riot. He won election in 1962 partly on the basis of his critique of Mayor Miriani's implementation of Stop-and-Frisk, which netted him a huge proportion of the black electorate. Once in office, he proceeded to implement a number of progressive policies designed to alleviate the race gap in Detroit, including in employment discrimination, substandard housing, and discriminatory and abusive policing. One of his most controversial policies was the decision to rapidly and dramatically change the hiring process of the Detroit Police Department to increase the number

[127] "The Jerome P. Cavanagh Collection," Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, 1-2, https://reuther.wayne.edu/files/UP000379.pdf.

of black police officers. He also initiated jobs programs for the unemployed and for youths from low-income families, including establishing a scholarship program to encourage black students to attend nursing school with the aim of alleviating the racial disparity in hospitals.[128] After decades of stagnating race relations and simmering violence, Mayor Cavanagh appeared to have found the solution to Detroit's crisis.

Mayor Cavanagh's first major test in the face of racial violence came in August 1966, in what came to be known as the Kercheval Incident. Beginning on Tuesday, August 9 and lasting three days, a civil disorder broke out in Detroit that presaged the larger violence of 1967. The incident began when four police officers approached a group of men loitering near the intersection of the streets Kercheval and Pennsylvania. The men resisted, and the interaction rapidly escalated as a crowd of between 75 and 100 people began to throw rocks and bottles at the police.[129] Police finally contained the disorder by August 12, which Mayor Cavanagh attributed to the police department's "high standards of professionalism."[130] However, the mayor's internal report of the incident dives deeper into the reasons behind the successful containment of the Kercheval incident. The report notes that bars, liquor stores, and Belle Isle were immediately closed off in order to decrease the odds of looting, and that police refrained from mass arrests in an attempt to avoid aggravating the mob.[131] However, Cavanagh's praise for the Police Intelligence Section particularly stands out. According to Cavanagh, the Police Intelligence Section logged all relevant information about the disorder from both the area

[128] Ibid.
[129] "Experience Report," May 1967, Jerome P. Cavanagh Papers, Box 393, Folder 16, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, 2.
[130] Ibid., 2.
[131] Ibid.

around Kercheval and from the entire city. In particular, the intelligence unit surveilled black "extremist organizations," which resulted in the seizure of "an automobile laden with large quantities of guns."[132]

Cavanagh's success in identifying the carload of guns as a possible source of escalation and in heading off that threat through the use of a well-developed network of intelligence undoubtedly shaped his strategy entering the following summer. As the summer of 1967 approached, Cavanagh began to develop policies to preempt the possibility of further disorders. Broadly speaking, these policies can be sorted into two types: structural policies and operational policies. Structural policies addressed riot factors that existed within the community, such as unemployment or the lack of childcare. Operation policies addressed internal government and police strategies to prevent and cope with potential riots. One of the most significant structural policies that Mayor Cavanagh implemented targeted schoolchildren. Cavanagh, in addition to many social scientists, believed that because youths had more free time during the summer, they therefore had more opportunities to cause trouble.[133] In preparation for the summer months of 1967, and particularly in light of several indicators of potential future violence for the summer, he instructed Parks and Recreation Superintendent John M. May to deploy parks and playfield programs into "sensitive areas" over the summer.[134]

However, many of Cavanagh's preparations for the summer revolved around the development of operational policies. The deployment of so-called "listening posts" throughout

---

[132] Ibid.
[133] Robert L. Wells, "Cavanagh Urges Activity to Avert Summer Trouble," May 2, 1967, DCCR Collection, Series V, Box 3, Folder 7, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.
[134] Wells, "Cavanagh Urges Activity to Avert Summer Trouble."

Detroit particularly foreshadows the rise of rumor control. As the DCCR Director Richard V. Marks describes the posts, "the system…consists of 'listening posts, eyes and ears,' in the Negro community that will report signs of trouble."[135] However, Marks was quick to clarify that "we're not spies."[136] Regardless of whether Marks' assurance was legitimate, this policy was clearly an expansion of the Police Intelligence Section's work, which so impressed Cavanagh during the Kercheval Incident. However, the new listening posts differed from the original intelligence unit by bringing it under the authority of Richard Marks in the DCCR rather than the police department. While the reason for this shift is never made explicit in the available archival material, the DCCR had spent the past decade developing contacts in the black community as part of its work on race relations in the city. As a result, Cavanagh may have felt that the DCCR was more likely to receive valuable tips than a police department that was still broadly unpopular among the black community.

In an additional attempt to predict and preempt civil disorders, Mayor Cavanagh also developed an Early Warning System to identify high-risk areas. This system primarily relied on field workers and calls from citizens to determine where and when large-scale violence was likely to break out. The Early Warning System is particularly notable for its reliance on social and quantitative sciences to develop predictive models of violence. The system employed a dataset including 12 indicators, such as crime, truancy, and welfare, to develop statistical trends about areas of the city. Combined with qualitative rumor reports from citizens and field

[135] Jerry M. Flint, "Detroit Sets Up 'Listening Posts': System Is Designed to Alert Officials to Racial Unrest," *New York Times*, Sunday, June 9, 1967. From the DCCR Collection, Series V, Box 3, Folder 9, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.
[136] Ibid.

workers, city officials believed that the Early Warning System could predict potential problem areas.[137] This model for Detroit's Early Warning System leading up to the 1967 riot foreshadows the rise of Detroit's rumor control center in two ways. First, the logic of the rumor control center is predicated on the idea that the causal agents of riots could be scientifically mapped, predicted, and prevented. This Early Warning System model reflects the growing confidence among social scientists and local officials during this time period that complex social processes could be understood and directed, which was an essential condition for the rise of rumor control centers. Second, this model explicitly states that rumors are valuable data for quantifying high-risk areas. While previous programs like the Community Barometer understood that rumors could contribute to riots, this system marks the first time in Detroit that city officials believed that rumors could be *controlled*, insofar as they could be accurately aggregated, reduced to variables, and used to predict future riots.

Cavanagh also deployed a Summer Task Force in conjunction with the Early Warning System. The task force itself had four main functions. First, the group monitored the city for potential areas of trouble. Second, the group reported dangerous or potentially incendiary incidents to the police and other relevant government authorities. Third, the group responded to grievances that could potentially lead to increased community friction. Finally, the task force was tasked with dispelling rumors.[138] This function of the task force, in the context of

---

[137] "City of Detroit: Resource Mobile Units (RMU)," DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series VI, Box 71, Folder 9, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, 3.

[138] "Remarks by Mayor Jerome P. Cavanagh before the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, Tuesday, August 15, 1967, 10:00 A.M.," in *APPEARANCE OF THE CITY OF DETROIT BEFORE THE PRESIDENT'S NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMISSION ON CIVIL DISORDERS,* August 15, 1967, National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, Series 17, Box 4, "Detroit Survey, July-September 1967: Detroit Urban Data; Mayor Cavanagh's Report," Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas, 9.

Cavanagh's other interventions to dispel rumors, particularly stands out in the context of the city's history with riots that were sparked by rumors. In fact, while Cavanagh was widely known for his investment in structural reform, he had already developed the framework for a rumor control center prior to the 1967 riot in the form of listening posts, early warning systems, and task forces.

Between Cavanagh's new framework of urban surveillance and his long track record of progressive racial reforms, people around the nation widely perceived Detroit to be the least likely site of a riot in 1967. These people were correspondingly shocked when Detroit in fact witnessed one of the largest and most destructive riots in American history. A stunned Daniel P. Moynihan reflected this sentiment in an op-ed to the Sunday Denver Post in August 1967. Moynihan expressed that cities like Newark almost "deserved" a riot due to their high unemployment, corruption, police brutality, and "backward" racial policies.[139] Detroit, on the other hand, seemed to be the antithesis of Newark. Moynihan praised Detroit's racial reforms, pointing out that black leaders occupied prominent positions in the city government and represented half of all black membership in the House of Representatives. He also pointed to the labor reforms spearheaded by Detroit's robust labor unions and the economic resurgence that had occurred under Cavanagh, undoing some of the worst consequences of the deindustrialization of the 1950s. Finally, Moynihan also referenced the Summer Task Force and the intelligence programs designed to prevent summer violence.[140] After reflecting on all of the

[139] Moynihan, "Where the American Liberals Went Wrong."
[140] Ibid.

systemic and institutional policies that Cavanagh had employed prior to the riot, Moynihan left his readers with a simple question: "How then could Detroit riot?"[141]

Of course, Moynihan's account of Detroit's race relations overstates the effectiveness of Cavanagh's policies. They were progressive relative to those of other cities at the time, but in absolute terms, even Detroit's most progressive policies had a small impact on the very large problems of housing discrimination, unemployment and unequal pay, and simmering racial resentment faced by Detroit and the nation writ large. However, Moynihan's article does clearly articulate the shock that these policies apparently did nothing to even reduce the scale of the riot. If Detroit still had the most destructive riot of the summer despite these policies designed to prevent and mitigate riots, this thinking went, then maybe they did not have any bearing on the causes of riots.

Cavanagh grappled with this dilemma as he traveled to Washington, D.C. to testify before the Kerner Commission. While discussing the events leading up to the riot and his reaction to its early stages, Cavanagh acknowledged that "hindsight is a great instructor. I have learned much from it."[142] Nevertheless, Cavanagh also argued that he "cannot honestly say today that under the circumstances of the hour, and with the information that I had at the time --- with rumors having almost the authority of facts -- that I could have done much better than I did."[143] His statement to the Kerner commission is significant because he clearly articulates the role that rumors played in complicating responses to the riot. When the final report of the

[141] Ibid.
[142] "Remarks by Mayor Jerome P. Cavanagh before the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, Tuesday, August 15, 1967, 10:00 A.M.," 9.
[143] Ibid.

Kerner commission stated that, "while rumors do not start riots, they do keep them going and can and do make them worse. Rumors can create a climate of hatred. Rumors significantly aggravated tension and disorder in more than 5 percent of the disorders studied," one can hear echoes of Cavanagh's testimony before the commission.[144]

Cavanagh's testimony also marked an internal realization. In the original copy of Cavanagh's remarks before the Kerner commission, Cavanagh's personal notations are scrawled across the pages of this copy of his prepared remarks. One note, in particular, stands out for its implications for the creation of Detroit's rumor control center. When discussing the role of the Mayor's Summer Task Force in attempting to "head off summer riots" during the summer of 1967, Cavanagh marked the Task Force's attempt to "dispel rumors" with two thick black underlines. At the bottom of the page, highlighted by a star, Cavanagh wrote: "machinery required for this."[145] This notation represents a significant shift in Detroit's history of rumor control. Detroit's Community Barometer gave way in the early 1960's to Cavanagh's Summer Task Force. But after the failure of the Task Force to prevent the 1967 riot, Cavanagh decided that this method of riot prevention was insufficient. New machinery was required.

There is important symbolic significance in Cavanagh's emphasis on rumor control rather than grievances as the most important area for improvement with respect to riot prevention. In addition to dispelling rumors, the Summer Task Force was also required to "deal promptly with grievances."[146] In the context of the Task Force, grievances should be understood

---

[144] Community Relations Service, "Rumor Control Conference," excerpt of the final report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, as cited by the Community Relations Service and Department of Justice, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series VI, Box 71, Folder 39, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, 1.
[145] "Remarks by Mayor Jerome P. Cavanagh," 9.
[146] Ibid.

as immediate or short-term wrongs and unfair treatment. Moreover, Cavanagh's policies while in office were not just focused on addressing immediate grievances, but also structural grievances. His policies on housing discrimination, policing, and education all reflect Cavanagh's interest in advancing policies that addressed black grievances in Detroit. To say that Cavanagh abandoned his belief in major structural reform would be to overstate the change in his mentality; the rest of his testimony before the commission makes it clear that he maintained the importance of the policies he implemented prior to the riot. However, while he believed in the importance of the *continuation* of his earlier responses to structural grievances, he also clearly believed that the most important *change* in policy was in the machinery governing rumor control.

The establishment of a mechanism of rumor control also became increasingly important in the case of Detroit. On November 15, 1967, while Cavanagh was still surveying the damage caused by the 1967 riot, *The Detroit News* shut down as its workers went on strike. *The Detroit Free Press* quickly followed suit, effectively eliminating the two largest sources of news in Detroit.[147] The newspapers did not resume operations until 267 days later, the longest newspaper strike in American history at the time.[148] In the absence of credible news sources, rumors were more likely to proliferate. This context helps to explain why Cavanagh chose to embrace rumor control over structural reform—even if he understood that systemic inequalities were more responsible for the proliferation of riots in the long term, rumor control nevertheless required more urgent interventions in post-riot Detroit. Indeed, in his first public

[147] David C. Smith and Jack Martin, "Presses Roll After 267 Days," *Detroit Free Press* 138, no. 97, August 10, 1968, pg. 1.
[148] Ibid., 2.

announcement regarding the formation of the rumor control center, Cavanagh stated that "in the absence of newspapers…I urge every citizen of the Detroit Metropolitan area to make use of the Rumor Control Center."[149]

Mayor Cavanagh continued to speak out about the importance of rumor control. In March 1968, he gave a telling speech to suburban mayors in the Detroit metro area about the 1967 riot. Namely, he condemned the "irresponsible rumors" that circulated in cities and suburbs during periods of violence and argued that local governments needed to "enlist the support of all public officials in the area in educating their citizens and in dispelling rumors."[150] However, he also affirmed his ultimate point that "riots are not inevitable."[151] Cavanagh's personal notes and public statements are thus aligned both with regards to his focus on rumors as a causal factor in the riots and with his belief that, with appropriate "machinery" to tamp down rumors, riots could be prevented.

To develop this machinery, Mayor Cavanagh turned towards Chicago. Beginning in the mid-1960s, Chicago began to experiment with the first rumor control center in the country. When the Kerner commission identified the Chicago Rumor Central as an effective model of rumor control, Cavanagh asked the Chicago Commission on Human Relations—the office that had purview over the Rumor Central—for information relevant for establishing his own rumor control center in Detroit. The city of Chicago responded with a memo entitled "Rumor Central,"

---

[149] "Rumor, Tension, and Incident Control," memorandum from Richard V. Marks to Commission Information and Action, Detroit Commission on Community Relations, March 11, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 7, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.
[150] "Outline for Remarks by Mayor Jerome P. Cavanagh to Suburban Mayors: Thursday, March 14, 1968," March 14, 1968, Jerome P. Cavanagh Papers, Box 407, Folder 6, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, 1.
[151] Ibid.

which laid out in detail the infrastructure and planning necessary for establishing a rumor control center in Detroit. The memo noted five basic considerations in establishing a rumor control center: publicizing the center's phone number, collecting necessary equipment, hiring the requisite personnel, clearly defining operational procedures, and establishing communication lines with the local police and fire departments, as well as any other sources of local intelligence.[152]

The report proceeded to lay out the logistics of each one of these five considerations in detail, including the number of telephone numbers and lines to employ, how to use "large maps" and blackboards, and how to appropriately log calls and structure internal forms. A separate document from Detroit's rumor control center details a seven-tiered operational organization. First, telephone calls were received and logged by the employees or volunteers who manned the phone the lines 24/7. Second, these logs were relayed to the operational staff. Third, the staff consulted control center materials, such as maps or files, in an attempt to ascertain the veracity of the rumors. Fourth, the original calls were returned and followed up on, based on the information determined in the previous step. Fifth, the calls for the day were tallied by either the Information Specialist or on-duty clerks. Sixth, officials compiled daily and monthly reports of the call logs. Finally, these reports were distributed to the Central Office for city officials to study.[153] However, while Detroit followed much of the Chicago model of rumor control, it diverged from the staffing model of Chicago and many other rumor control centers that would soon emerge around the country. While DCCR staff controlled the rumor control

[152] "Rumor Central," 2.
[153] "City of Detroit: Operations Center," Attachment #3, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series VI, Box 71, Folder 7, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

center during weekdays, rumor calls were directed to the Detective Bureau in the police department after 5 pm on weeknights and during the weekend.[154]

In a memorandum from DCCR Director Richard Marks to the staff of the rumor control center, he delineates between the different types of calls that the staff will hear and how they should respond to the different types of calls. Marks divided potential calls into six categories: 1) crank calls, 2) gossip calls, 3) requests for irrelevant information, 4) rumors or questions about individuals, organizations, or agencies, 5) speculative rumors, and 6) rumors on past and present issues and events. He defines crank calls in the memo as either abusive calls or calls offering suggestions for irrelevant city problems and suggests that staff should either hang up or end the call as soon as possible. Gossip calls involve information regarding an individual's personal life; staff were directed to clarify the function of the center and how these calls are not a part of its function. Requests for irrelevant information were to be met with a similar response. Callers asking questions about rumors regarding specific individuals, organizations, or agencies were to be referred to those agencies or groups. The primary function of the center dealt with the final two categories of calls. Speculative rumors, which regarded future racial incidents that could not be investigated, were to be probed for as much information as possible.[155] However, staff members were also asked to repeat a prepared statement for these calls:

> There are no facts to substantiate this statement as anything but a rumor. Riots of this type of incident are not inevitable and no one is able to predict what will happen in the future. The City

[154] "Rumor, Tension, and Incident Control."
[155] "Memorandum to Staff of the Rumor Control Center from Richard V. Marks," March 20, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series VI, Box 71, Folder 8, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, 1.

> of Detroit is prepared to handle any situation that occurs, and we believe that the public good cannot be served by repeating rumors such as these."[156]

This statement is clearly intended to fulfill one of the primary functions of the rumor control center: to minimize panic and control the spread of rumor. The statement served this purpose both explicitly, by asking the caller not to repeat the rumor, and implicitly, by reminding the caller that riots—and the rumors that the caller was reporting—were not inevitable. The center also focused on the final category, in which a caller asked questions or gave information about an incident that had already happened or was in progress. Marks instructed staff to follow a similar procedure for probing facts that they conducted for speculative rumors, except without the prepared statement. Marks instructed the staff to try, "if possible to convert the caller from believing the rumor as 'fact', to recognizing its source and questioning the reason for its being spread by this source."[157]

On March 6, 1968, after months of planning, Mayor Cavanagh delivered a televised address publicly announcing for the first time that he had directed the DCCR to establish a rumor control center. He urged citizens to report rumors to the center, stated the number for the center and assured that "each rumor will be checked out, the true facts established and an effort made to dispel the rumor before it can do any more damage."[158] Shortly afterwards, the Detroit rumor control center began to publicize its number in local newspapers. Notably, newspapers often publicized the number for the center. In one instance, a local newspaper

---

[156] Ibid., 2.
[157] Ibid.
[158] "Memorandum for Commission Information and Action from Richard V. Marks, Secretary-Directory," March 11, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series VI, Box 71, Folder 7, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, 1.

published an editorial urging citizens to report rumors to the newly established rumor control center. Complaining about newspapers' inability to vet all of the rumors that would flood in prior to the establishment of the rumor control center, the editorial stated that "there is a need for the Rumor Control center. We urge all our readers to call the center, 963-9550, immediately upon hearing any rumor before spreading it blindly…there is too much to lose."[159]

This sense of urgency existed in every major city in the country after the long, hot summer of 1967. However, it was no coincidence that Detroit's rumor control center was the first to open in the wake of 1967. Detroit's exceptional history of riots and rumors uniquely positioned the city to become the national face of rumor control. As far back as 1943, Detroit experienced the role of rumors in directly instigating major riots and correspondingly had the historical experience experimenting with methods of urban monitoring like the Community Barometer. With Cavanagh's early experimentation with proto-rumor control methods in the period immediately preceding the 1967 riot, he was poised to fully embrace rumor control centers in the aftermath of the violence. He was also particularly likely to embrace rumor control in light of the Kercheval Incident, which functioned as a proof of concept. In fact, when newspapers warned citizens that there was "too much to lose" by not calling the rumor control center, they referred directly to both the Belle Isle Bridge Incident and the Kercheval Incident as not just proof of the risks, but also as roadmaps for success through an improved version of the Community Barometer and the Early Warning System.[160] Moreover, the newspaper strike of 1967-1968 further clarified the apparent necessity of establishing some mechanism to

[159] "Check Out Rumors at 963-9550 First."
[160] Ibid.

eliminate harmful rumors and spread accurate information. While the rise of Detroit's rumor control center to national prominence was not inevitable, Detroit's history made the city uniquely likely to become the focal point of this new method of urban surveillance.

The Fall of the Detroit Rumor Control Center

Six years after the opening of Detroit's rumor control center in 1968, it went silent. It averaged approximately three to five calls per week, an average elevated by an increase in calls during President Nixon's impeachment. Even these few calls were primarily crank calls. As a result, no one worked the phones full-time anymore, financial and institutional support declined, and the center began to fade from the public mind.[161] This rapid decline in Detroit's rumor control center represents an interesting anomaly. The rumor control center handled as many as 1,400 calls on a given week during the first months of operation in 1968. With generous operational support from the local and federal government, Detroit's center emerged as one of the primary faces of rumor control for cities around the country. Moreover, bureaucracy tends to move slowly; an institution with this high usage rate and national support should not have ceased operations in only six years.

In fact, an examination of the rumor control center's records indicates that the decline of Detroit's center began well before 1974. The first two weeks of operation for the center in 1968 were unusually active. Over these 10 days of weekday operations, the city received an average of over 206 rumor calls per day. The first two days in particular were the busiest, with 520 and 394 calls per day. Based on the rumor write-ups, a general interest in reporting rumors to this novel apparatus, rather than the mass prediction of a singular event, likely contributed to the abnormally high number of calls at the opening of the center. Initially, the police division responsible for supplementing the work of the rumor control center received the vast majority

[161] Paul Bernstein, "Few Calls: Detroit's Rumor Control Center Slows to Nearly a Standstill," unidentified newspaper clipping, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 8, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

of the calls, but after the first few days of operation, the rumor control center took over as the dominant governmental body responding to rumor calls:

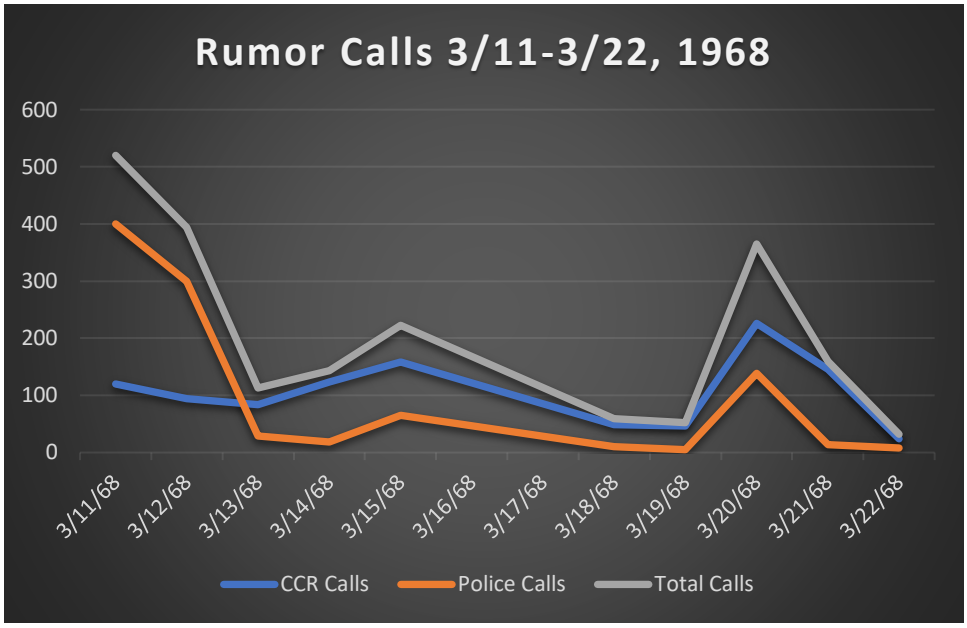

Figure 3.1[162]

These first two weeks of operation provide insight into the workings of Detroit's rumor control center. Rumors from the early period of March broadly exist within two categories. Some of these rumor calls did, in fact, reference impending riots. For example, a Mrs. Kivela reported to the center that she read in a magazine that "a riot was going to break out this summer and it would be mainly in the northwest."[163] The collection of this type of rumor is most in line with the goal of the rumor control center insofar as it identified a potential conflict and isolated a particular geographic hotspot. However, not all riot rumors were as specific as Mrs. Kivela's. The day before Mrs. Kivela called the center, a Mrs. Harwell phoned into the center to report that she "heard from her neighbor who heard from her aunt who heard from a lady in

[162] Based on the data from "Rumor Calls CCR," April 17, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 8, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.
[163] "Rumor Report Sheet," Rumor #5, March 8, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 10, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

Birmingham who heard from her neighbor who heard from her cleaning woman that the riot was to start on July 1st."[164] Clearly, the long grapevine that this rumor passed through, as well as the lack of any specifics about the theoretically impending riot, meant that the rumor lacked any actionable intelligence. Nevertheless, the subject matter was at least relevant to the rumor control center's intended mission.

However, many of the rumor calls in the first days that the center was open did not concern riots. One of the most common themes among the rumors in early March was a concern about black gangs or militants killing white children and women. A Mrs. Ordus called into the rumor control center to report a rumor she ostensibly overheard in a park that "'leaders' have gangs that will kill 'white' children—one a day—for a period of time."[165] The same day, Mrs. Worman called in to report that militants were planning to kill white children.[166] Mrs. Barley called in shortly after with a similar report that militants were planning to kill white mothers and their children. To the extent that the riot reports by Mrs. Kivela and Harwell reflected racial anxiety, they were at least connected to a concrete event that the rumor control center could investigate. These white child rumors, however, represented a more distilled form of racial anxiety that was largely disconnected from the pretense of an actual conflict event. Instead, they reflected vague speculation about impending racial conflict that more closely reflected a race war—an organized plot by one race against another—than a spontaneous riot. Moreover, while the prevalence of rumors about black gangs killing white

---

[164] "Rumor Report Sheet," Rumor #1, March 7, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 10, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.
[165] "Rumor Report Sheet," Rumor #3, March 8, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 10, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.
[166] "Rumor Report Sheet," Rumor #9, March 8, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 10, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

children may not have been a phenomenon exclusive to Detroit, they strike a notable parallel to the rumor of a white child being thrown off a bridge that sparked the 1943 Detroit race riot.[167]

After the initial rush of calls in the first days of the rumor control center, the rate of calls declined and leveled off at an average of 118 calls per day between March 13 and March 19, 1968. This average was still higher than in many subsequent weeks, but its stability reflects a "baseline" level of calls during the first two weeks of operation. Calls notably surged twice above this baseline. The first occurred during the initial days of operation, when Detroit citizens were presumably excited or interested in the opening of the center. However, there was a second surge in calls from 52 on March 19 to 365 on March 20 and 160 on March 21. An examination of the rumor write-ups from the center reveals that the vast majority of the calls inquired about a rumored demonstration or protest at Hudson's, a well-known department store In Detroit.[168] The event in question began when H. Rap Brown, the chairman of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and a leader of the Black Power movement, was arrested in New Orleans based on a federal indictment for bringing a rifle from New York. SNCC then sponsored a demonstration in Detroit on March 20, 1968 protesting Brown's incarceration that ultimately drew approximately 600 people. Of these 600 protestors, about 150 reportedly broke off from the main group to occupy Hudson's and demand free guns.[169]

---

[167] Capeci and Wilkerson, "The Detroit Rioters of 1943," 53.
[168] For example, see "Rumor Report Sheet," unnumbered, March 21, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 19, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.
[169] "Mob Demands Guns in Detroit," *The Michigan Daily* 78, no. 143, March 21, 1968, accessed in the Michigan Daily Digital Archives.

Clearly, then, the spike in the number of calls to the rumor control center on March 20 correlated with the protest supporting Brown. Significantly, the increase in calls came on March 20 and 21, rather than March 18 or 19. The two theorized functions of the rumor control center were to predict future riots based on the prevalence of rumors in or about a particular area and to increase information during times of community tension in order to prevent rumors from further exacerbating existing conflict. Even in the first two weeks of the rumor control center's operations, a pattern emerged that the predictive or speculative rumors tended to reflect racial anxiety rather than the actual potential for conflict events, while the rumors seeking to confirm information about ongoing events corresponded with increases in rumor calls that occurred during contentious moments like the demonstrations for H. Rap Brown. Moreover, if the rapid surges of calls into the center correlated with ongoing events, the baseline rate of calls in between spikes likely represents a high proportion of speculative rumor calls.

This inference is borne out in a long-term analysis of the rumor control center's call log and write-up data. Between March 22 and April 3, the center averaged 42.5 calls per day with a standard deviation of 16.3.[170] Given the low variation in the day-to-day call rate during this time, the period can be described as a "baseline period," where one should expect a high ratio of speculative calls to descriptive or informational calls. Notably, this baseline is almost one third the baseline rate of the first two weeks of operation. However, accounting for the novelty of the center boosting the average baseline calls during the first two weeks resolves this discrepancy. As a result, a more realistic prediction for the long-term baseline call rate is near

[170] Average and standard deviation are calculated based on the data from "Rumor Calls CCR," April 17, 1968.

40 calls per day. Moreover, the prediction that this baseline is predominantly defined by speculative rumor calls bears out with an analysis of call logs of the rumor control center, which categorize the calls into a variety of types. While the call log data is incomplete for part of this period, the existing data reports 35 calls that were categorized by the rumor control center as speculative, with only 17 calls categorized as rumors on present events or incidents.[171]

The April 4 assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. marked the next significant surge in calls. The rumor control center's phone lines initially became overwhelmed on April 4, 1968 and peaked on April 7 with 1399 calls in one day. Call log data from the rumor control center indicates that King's assassination led to elevated traffic at the rumor control center for approximately 10 days in total, until calls once again reached a baseline equilibrium around April 14:

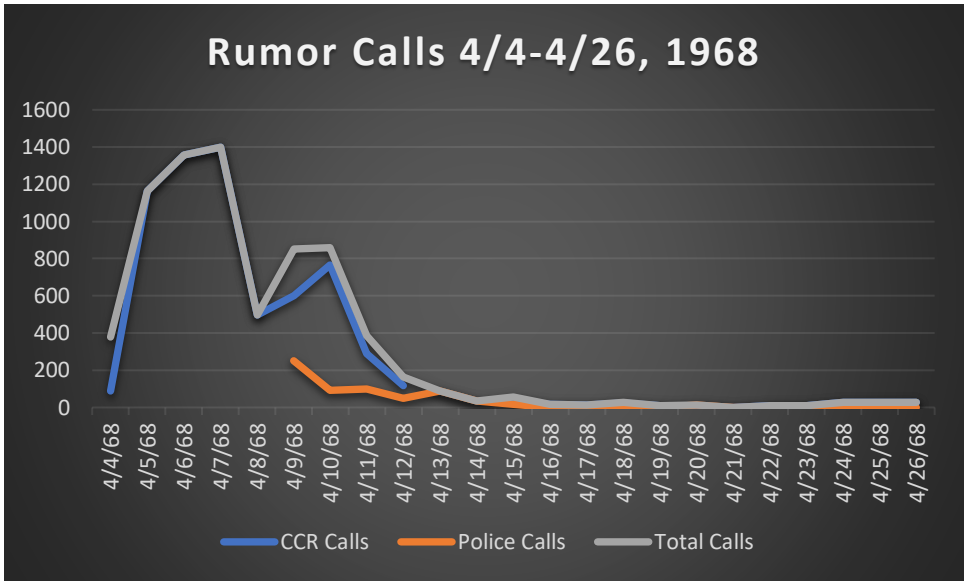

Figure 3.2[172]

[171] Calculated by adding Type E and F calls from "Rumor Calls: Memorandum from Richard V. Marks to Mayor Jerome P. Cavanagh," from March 22, 25, 26, and 27, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 72, Folder 10. This analysis excludes crank calls, gossip calls, requests for irrelevant information, and rumors or questions of public policy nature.

[172] Based on the data from "Rumor Calls CCR," April 17, 1968.

As with the Rap Brown incident, King's assassination generated widespread fear that the assassination would lead to or had already initiated a wave of violence similar to 1967. Indeed, this fear was not without merit, as cities around the countries did in fact experience massive riots in the wake of the King assassination. While the significance of the King assassination was substantially greater than the Rap Brown protest—and the spike in call volume was correspondingly larger—the incoming calls were similar in that they were predominantly information-seeking rumors. For example, one caller on April 5 asked if there was rioting and if the National Guard would be called up, to which a rumor control center staff member reassured the caller that there was in fact no rioting and that only precautionary measures were being taken.[173] Another caller reported a rumor of fires on 12th Street and asked whether a curfew was in effect. The rumor control center staff member debunked the rumor about fires and repeated the standard line that the curfew was simply a precautionary measure.[174] These rumor calls composed the majority of the calls into the rumor control center during this period of heightened tension, and the role of the center in providing accurate information and debunking rumors about riots and fires clearly served to reduce the possibility of escalating fear and panic.

However, a sense of peace returned to the city by April 14th. By then, the volume of calls once again stabilized to a baseline equilibrium; from April 14 to the end of April, the rumor control center received an average of 21.2 calls per day, with a standard deviation of 14.4.[175]

---

[173] "Rumor Report Sheet," anonymous white male, 3:35pm, April 5, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 31, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.
[174] "Rumor Report Sheet," anonymous white male, 3:36pm, April 5, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 31, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.
[175] Figures are calculated based on the data from "Rumor Calls CCR," April 17, 1968.

And once again, speculative rumors based on racial anxiety rather than real intelligence characterized this baseline period of calls. For example, on April 17, 1968, one caller inquired as to whether "Black militants" had killed someone in Oak Park, which the rumor control center refuted.[176] The following day, a caller reported that they overheard a group in a bar planning the next riot.[177] On May 1, a caller reported a rumor that students from Mumford High School—a majority black public school in Detroit—had plans to come to school with guns.[178] The rumor control center ultimately debunked all of these rumors. The summer months continued predominantly in the same fashion, with an average call rate of 16.8 calls per day from May 1 to July 31, 1968.[179]

However, three events interrupted the sense of quiet that had returned to Detroit. The first incident began the night of May 13 when a Midwestern arm of the Poor People's Campaign staged a demonstration at Cobo Hall, Detroit's largest convention center. When police arrived to tow a demonstrator's truck parked across from the center, a group of protestors split off from the larger rally and broke the legs off of tables to use as weapons. Approximately 200 police officers arrived on the scene to contain about 1000 members of the campaign as the threat of violence increased, but ultimately leaders of the rally dissuaded their members from using violence and the rally relocated to a church in the city.[180] During the course of this

[176] "Rumor Calls: Memorandum from Richard V. Marks to Mayor Jerome P. Cavanagh," Wednesday, April 17, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 72, Folder 10, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.
[177] "Rumor Calls: Memorandum from Richard V. Marks to Mayor Jerome P. Cavanagh," April 18, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 72, Folder 10, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.
[178] "Rumor Calls: Memorandum from Richard V. Marks to Mayor Jerome P. Cavanagh," May 1, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 72, Folder 10, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.
[179] Average is calculated based on the data from "Rumor Calls CCR," April 17, 1968.
[180] Ron Landsman, "Incident Mars Detroit Poor People's March," *The Michigan Daily* 78, no. 10, May 14, 1968, pg. 1.

incident, the rumor control center received 58 calls, all but two of which concerned the events at Cobo Hall. Most of the callers asked for factual clarification on rumors about the incident, while three callers asked whether any police involved in the incident had been suspended.[181] However, despite the seriousness of the incident, the rumor control center only received 58 calls—less than half as many as a typical day in the first weeks of the center—while the number of calls in the two subsequent days immediately declined to 27 and 8, respectively.[182] As a result, this event marked the first sign that calls into the rumor control center during crisis periods were already beginning to decline.

These low levels of phone traffic lasted until the assassination of the popular New York senator Robert F. Kennedy on June 6. Senator Kennedy, the brother of former president John F. Kennedy, was in the midst of his own presidential campaign when a Jordanian man named Sirhan Sirhan shot him in response to comments Kennedy had made about Arab-Israeli relations.[183] In response to the assassination, calls into the center jumped from 25 on June 5 to 69 on June 6. While it is impossible to compare the public significance of Senator Kennedy's assassination relative to Dr. King's, both were public figures broad name recognition, and like Dr. King, Kennedy had substantial African American support for his social justice and civil rights advocacy and opposition to racial discrimination and the Vietnam War.[184] Nevertheless, the 69 calls concerning Kennedy's assassination were a far cry from the nearly 5,000 calls that Detroit's

[181] "Rumor Calls: Memorandum from Richard V. Marks to Mayor Jerome P. Cavanagh," May 14, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 72, Folder 10, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.
[182] "Rumor Calls: Memorandum from Richard V. Marks to Mayor Jerome P. Cavanagh," May 14-16, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 72, Folder 10, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.
[183] "Doctors Report Kennedy Still 'Extremely Critical,'" *The Michigan Daily* 78, no. 24, June 6, 1968, pg. 1.
[184] Richard D. Kahlenberg, "The Inclusive Populism of Robert F. Kennedy," *The Century Foundation*, March 16, 2018, https://tcf.org/content/report/inclusive-populism-robert-f-kennedy/?session=1.

rumor control center received in the wake of King's assassination, providing further comparative evidence that the rumor control center already experienced a lower call volume for similar events only three months after its opening.

Later that summer, another urban riot sparked a more significant spike in call volume from July 24-26. The uptick in calls followed an incident in Cleveland, Ohio on the night of July 23. That night, five men reportedly opened fire on a passing police task force vehicle from an apartment at the intersection of Beulah Avenue and Lakeview Road, an area in a predominantly black neighborhood in Cleveland. The resulting shootout killed six people, including three police officers, and wounded at least 15 others. Police finally emptied the apartment using tear gas and high-powered rifles, but by this point widespread reports of looting and fires had already spread across the city. Responding to the incident, Ohio governor James Rhodes ordered all 15,250 Ohio National Guardsmen to Cleveland to restore order.[185] The disorder was ultimately quelled on July 24 when Cleveland mayor Carl Stokes—the first black mayor of a major city—requested the withdrawal of the National Guard, whom he replaced with 500 black police officers and 500 black community leaders. These interventions, combined with a heavy rainfall that night, quieted the violence by the end of the day.[186]

Initially, this disorder seems disconnected from the concerns of the average Detroiter. However, the long, hot summer of 1967 and the King riots of 1968 had demonstrated to the American public that riots often came in geographically disparate waves during this period. Mayor Stokes fanned these flames when he declared that the FBI had informed him two days

[185] "Six Dead: Guard Called into Cleveland," *The Michigan Daily* 78, no. 51, July 24, 1968, pg. 1.
[186] "Blacks Patrol in Cleveland: Rain Helps End Disturbance; Whites Banned from Riot Area," *The Michigan Daily* 78, no. 52, July 25, 1968, pg. 1.

prior to the incident that Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, and Pittsburg were "in for trouble."[187] The FBI declined to comment on Stokes' remarks, but the agency does have a history of investigating black leaders deemed potential instigators of violence. In a memo to President Johnson in January 1968, Special Assistant Joseph Califano revealed that the Department of Justice had created a secret intelligence unit to investigate "Black Nationalist groups" as part of a strategy of advanced planning for riots in the summer of 1968.[188] Regardless of whether the FBI had in fact contacted Mayor Stokes or whether their intelligence was accurate, when he tied the disorder in Cleveland to "'a small and determined' band of Negro militants" and a multi-state conspiracy, Stokes sparked a brief panic in Detroit.

This anxiety resulted in a burst of anxious calls into the Detroit rumor control center. On July 24, the center received 122 calls; almost all of them concerned the Cleveland incident. Many of the callers wanted to know whether Detroit's National Guardsmen had been put on alert, whether there were currently riots in Detroit, and if any riots were planned for Detroit in the following days.[189] The calls peaked at 250 on July 25 after Detroit Police Commissioner Johannes Spreen confirmed that his department had received advance warning of a possible disturbance.[190] Once again, the callers predominantly asked about whether there were

[187] "Blacks Patrol in Cleveland," *Michigan Daily,* 1.
[188] "Memorandum for the President from Joe Califano," January 18, 1968, Thursday, 10:30 p.m., White House Central Files, FG 135, Box 185, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, TX.
[189] "Rumor Calls: Memorandum from Richard V. Marks to Mayor Jerome P. Cavanagh," July 24, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 72, Folder 10, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.
[190] "Mayor Pulls Out Cleveland Troops," *Augusta Chronicle*, July 25, 1968, pg. 1, accessed online at *America's Historical Newspapers* on February 26, 2020.

currently riots in Detroit or planned riots for the weekend.[191] However, when violence failed to materialize in Detroit, the calls tapered down to a baseline level again by July 27, 1968.

This incident marked one of the last significant events that Detroit's rumor control center ever oversaw. The center only received an average of 1.3 calls per day from August 1 to December 31, 1968, with only two days of double-digit calls during this period—a mere 16 and 13 calls for these days. During this quiet period in the second half of 1968, the calls once again reverted back to occasional vague predictions of riots and racially tinged concerns, such as when a woman called in to the rumor control center expressing concern after she saw several cars with out of state licenses filled with (presumably black) men.[192] The rumor control center staff members even began to change how they logged their calls and write-ups. Whereas the staff used to record a log of all calls into the center—categorized by crank calls, gossip calls, irrelevant calls, questions about public policy, speculative rumors, and present day rumors—for each day, beginning on August 27, 1968, the center began to record multiple days on one log due to the high volume of days in which there were no callers.[193] August 29 to September 2 also marked the first five-day stretch in the history of the rumor control center when there were zero calls.[194] This trend continued throughout the rest of the year, with multiple weeks of no calls, interspersed with infrequent days of low-volume calls.

---

[191] "Rumor Calls: Memorandum from Richard V. Marks to Mayor Jerome P. Cavanagh," July 25, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 72, Folder 10, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.
[192] "Rumor Calls: Memorandum from Richard V. Marks to Mayor Jerome P. Cavanagh," August 22, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 72, Folder 10, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.
[193] "Rumor Calls: Memorandum from Richard V. Marks to Mayor Jerome P. Cavanagh," August 27-29, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 72, Folder 10, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.
[194] "Rumor Calls: Memorandum from Richard V. Marks to Mayor Jerome P. Cavanagh," August 27-29 and August 30-September 2, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 72, Folder 10, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

To be sure, the colder months were typically less prone to violence and rumors of violence than the summer months. However, 1969 reflected a continuation of the decline in phone traffic at the rumor control center rather than a reversion to busy summer months. Throughout all of 1969, the rumor control center only received an average of 2.2 calls per day.[195] In fact, the average number of calls during the core summer months of May through August was even lower than the average for the entire year, at 0.7 calls per day. A meager six calls on July 17 reflected the highest number of calls in a single day during this period.[196] Internal analyses by Detroit's Commission on Community Relations confirm that "the frequency of rumor calls has dropped off significantly since the period following the [King assassination]."[197] Because the rumor control center's best means of reducing the risk of violence was distributing accurate information or referring rumor reports to the police, the absence of significant surges in calls during periods of tension diminished the center's utility. The baseline levels of racially tinged rumormongering did not provide actionable intelligence, and the center did not even attempt to resolve the underlying roots of these callers' racism. Given that the core purpose of the rumor control center was to intervene in and prevent summer riots, the near total absence of calls from May to August indicates the sidelining of the center as a meaningful tool for reducing community tension.

This decline in overall call rate and the diminishing surges in calls during specific incidents can be traced to several trends specific to Detroit and its rumor control center. First,

---

[195] Average based on all available rumor call logs from 1969, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 72, Folder 11, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.
[196] "Rumor Calls: Memorandum from Richard V. Marks to Mayor Jerome P. Cavanagh," July 17, 1969, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 72, Folder 11, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.
[197] "Memorandum from the Detroit Commission on Community Relations to Mayors' Offices," in Community Relations Service, "Rumor Control Conference."

the steady drop in the rumor control center's phone traffic created a vicious cycle of decline for the rumor control center as an institution. The center did not exist in a vacuum, but rather operated within the complex internal politics of the DCCR. Its operation within this larger governmental body had several implications for the long-term viability of the rumor control center. As early as March 15, 1968, when the center was receiving hundreds of calls per day, senior officials in the Commission on Community Relations found that a large staff would be required "to properly service callers and handle the investigations related thereto."[198] However, by October 1969, the same officials realized the opportunity cost of reallocating staff members and funds to the rumor control center from other agencies in the commission. As members of the commission noted in a meeting, "effective staffing of [the rumor control center] distorts and disrupts the performance of the on-going work of the other divisions of the agency."[199] As the call volume declined to negligible amounts, it became increasingly difficult to justify the strain that the rumor control center placed on all of the other divisions of the commission. As a result, institutional support for the center shrank. By 1970, the rumor control center only employed two staff members for any given shift, further cementing its diminished relevance.[200]

Second, the information vacuum left by the newspaper strike of 1967-68 was filled when the strike ended and printing resumed. As Mayor Cavanagh specifically stated, the newspapers' inability to distribute accurate information which could dispel rumors was a

---

[198] "Memorandum from Richard V. Marks to Commission on Community Relations," March 15, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 16, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.
[199] "Highlights of the Commission Meeting," Detroit Commission on Community Relations, October 1969, Jerome P. Cavanagh Papers, Box 511, Folder 4, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State Library, Detroit, MI.
[200] Yasui, "A Study of 'Rumor Control.'"

primary impetus for the formation of the rumor control center.[201] By this same logic, however, when the newspapers began to print again on August 10, 1968—267 days after the start of the strike—the rumor control center no longer represented the primary tool for fighting rumors with accurate information. In particular, the newspapers' resumed practices may have most contributed to the reduction of large spikes in calls to the rumor control center during periods of high tension. Because callers during this period primarily wanted to verify information they heard, rather than to spread purely racialized rumors, the newspapers were ideally set up to fill in for the rumor control center. The fact that August 1968 marked a significant turning point in the average number of calls into the center corroborates this conclusion.

The third potential factor in the declining call rate is the staffing structure of the rumor control center. While the center was run under the purview of the Detroit Commission on Community Relations, the commission only staffed the center on weekdays from 9am to 5pm. From 5pm to 9am and during the weekends, police officers staffed the phones at the center. Naturally, this staffing arrangement presented a problem for an institution purporting to help resolve racial tension. Numerous complaints from callers detail the ways in which the police were often more abrupt and dismissive than commission staff, while one complaint reveals that police were sometimes unwilling to identify themselves.[202] Carl E. Heffernan, an inspector for the Citizen Complaint Bureau, was concerned enough about the complaints about police running the rumor control center that he wrote a letter to the Director of the DCCR, Richard V.

---

[201] Jerome P. Cavanagh, "Mayor Jerome P. Cavanagh Reports to the People," Text of Television Address Delivered March 7, 1968, pg. 2-3, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 7, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

[202] For the complaint about police self-identification, see "Letter from Roland J. Schneider to the Honorable Jerome P. Cavanagh," June 9, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 44, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

Marks, in August 1968. In the letter, Heffernan stated that "I am disturbed by the fact that this operation is run by professional people with the right concern from Monday through Friday," Heffernan wrote, "and then we turn around and place it in the hands of the police department…for the important weekend days of Saturday and Sunday when our citizens have more free time and rumors become even more rampant than during the week."[203] These complaints indicate that the rumor control center's reliance on the police to staff the call lines during some of the most critical hours of the week may well have damaged the reputation of the center by the time the newspaper strike ended and the average calls began to decline.

The overrepresentation of police in the rumor control center may have also contributed to the racial demographics of the callers. The DCCR archived some of the rumor write-ups written by staff members, many of which included the names and home addresses of the callers. Unfortunately, not enough of the write-ups were retained in the archives relative to the total number written to conduct a systematic statistical or geographical analysis of who called into the rumor control center. However, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that callers were predominantly white suburban women. The commission's archives contain an incomplete assortment of write-ups from early March 1968, the weekend of the King assassination, and September and October 1969. Of this subset of write-ups, 33 included the caller's name and gender; of these 33, 25 were women. Based on the write-ups from women that also included a home address or neighborhood, these women were universally from overwhelmingly white

[203] "Letter from Carl E. Heffernan to Richard Marks," August 2, 1968, DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 44, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

suburbs.[204] Of course, these write-ups represent an incredibly small proportion of the total number of write-ups recorded by the rumor control center in its first two years of operation, but comments from rumor control center officials validate this conclusion. At the rumor control conference hosted by the CRS, Director Marks wrote of Detroit's rumor control center that "calls came mainly from the suburbs surrounding Detroit (mainly white communities). A recurring rumor was of the speculative type illustrating the fear which had been generated in white communities."[205]

Marks' confirmation of the existing archival data suggested by the write-ups lends credence to the broader claim that white suburban women played an outsized role as callers into the rumor control center. Two conclusions can be drawn from this trend. First, police control of the center during night and weekend hours likely contributed to the racial imbalance in callers, as black callers were more likely to avoid calling the police for rumor verifications than white suburban women. Second, Marks' statement most likely became more true over time. His presentation at the CRS conference came in June 1968, when the rumor control center was still dealing with a high baseline of calls and a series of high-tension incidents. As the average call increasingly became the low-level, speculative rumors of late 1968 and 1969, white suburban women almost certainly composed an increasing cross-section of callers.

Finally, the internal politics of Detroit's Commission on Community Relations and its rumor control center led to conflict over internal demographic issues. An inspection by Mayor Cavanagh's office in July 1967 found that the Commission on Community Relations experienced

[204] Analysis based on all of the write-ups contained in the DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 10, Folder 19 and Folder 31, as well as Box 72, Folder 91.
[205] "Establishing a Rumor Control Center."

an abnormally high rate of employee turnover. Based on interviews with staff members, the inspection team found that Richard Marks, the director of the commission, was primarily responsible for these exoduses by berating and belittling staff members, as well as forcing out key black members of the commission.[206] Jospeh Coles, the assistant director of the commission and a leader in the black community, likewise complained that Marks did not "stay close to" black community leaders.[207] Coles experienced Marks' aggressive political tactics firsthand. Marks progressively took over all of Coles' duties as assistant director, to the point where the inspection team declared that Coles could do "seemingly nothing of great consequence."[208] Meanwhile, Marks actively attempted remove Coles and replace him with one of his preferred candidates.[209]

While reporters observed the Detroit rumor control center's standstill in 1974, the true roots of the center's decline trace back to August 1968—a mere five months after the center began operations. Moreover, while the pattern of calls into the center—baseline levels of speculative calls intermittently broken by spikes reacting to specific incidents—might be representative of rumor control centers as institutions, the decline in the usage of Detroit's center can be traced to specific, local factors. The end of the newspaper strike eliminated one of the original justifications for the rumor control center, specifically replacing the center's role in distributing accurate information during crises. The role of the police in the operation of the center led to demographic skews in callers, while Director Marks' abrasive leadership style and

[206] "Inspection of the Detroit Commission on Community Relations," Mayor's Inspection Team, July 13, 1967, pg. 3, Jerome P. Cavanagh Papers, Box 511, Folder 10, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.
[207] Ibid., 6-7.
[208] Ibid., 7.
[209] Ibid.

desire to consolidate power over the Commission on Community Relations directly led to the elimination of black voices on the commission that tried to correct some of these racial disparities. These factors led to the growing irrelevance of the rumor control center as an institution to the point that the city could no longer justify the tradeoff in money and staffing that was required to keep the center running. As a result, the rumor control center that spearheaded a national movement toward a new method of riot prevention fell into obscurity only months after its formation.

Conclusion

Detroit's rumor control center was not preordained. The rise and fall of Detroit's center resulted from a complex array of local and national factors, each one integral to the success or failure of this model of riot prevention. The 1919 and 1943 riots nationalized the conversation about racial violence from the threat of Southern lynching to the threat of nationwide waves of mass racial violence. These early riots, in conjunction with the decades-long civil rights movement, led to the rise of President Johnson. His political career proved integral to the development of rumor control centers in several ways. First, rumor control only came to be seen as a legitimate riot prevention mechanism after Johnson's Great Society programs failed to stop the 1967 riots. In the eyes of many at the time, the money, effort, and festering racial resentment that these programs cost was not justified if they could not mitigate even the most severe riots.

Second, in the wake of the 1967 riots, Johnson's establishment of the Kerner Commission was an essential step in validating rumor control as an effective means of riot prevention. Indeed, it is notable how many local officials explicitly pointed to the Commission's findings as their justification for exploring such a novel government institution. Moreover, as the CRS—another pet project of Johnson's—began to coordinate rumor control conferences, the federal government's support for the method became increasingly clear. While the CRS never received much historical attention, it was undoubtedly one of the most significant federal institutions with respects to the expansion of rumor control. Even as the Detroit rumor control center became the national representation of the concept, CRS conferences were still the primary vector by which Detroit officials were able to instruct other cities on how to establish

their own centers. As rumor control proliferated throughout the country at the active urging leaders from Detroit and Chicago, the CRS was the subtle but essential coordinator of these policies. As a result, there is no doubt that the story of rumor control in America is, in part, a national story.

However, this top-down approach to rumor control only tells half the story. Detroit did not become a leader in rumor control by accident. Even among cities with a history of race riots, the Belle Isle Bridge Incident that sparked Detroit's 1943 riot uniquely illustrated the power that racial rumors have to initiate large-scale violence. From then until the 1967 riot, the city repeatedly experimented with riot prediction methodologies, including the Community Barometer, the Early Warning System, and listening posts. Particularly immediately before and after the Kercheval Incident, Mayor Cavanagh was already investing in a proto-rumor control apparatus. As a result, it is unsurprising that Cavanagh was the first mayor to adopt the model of rumor control pioneered by Chicago's Rumor Central. Of course, Detroit may not have been unique in experimenting with riot prediction technology after experiencing riots. However, the information vacuum left in the wake of the 1967 riot by the newspaper strike left Detroit uniquely vulnerable to the spread of rumor and misinformation. As Cavanagh grappled with this challenge, he naturally turned first to a mechanism that could theoretically short circuit the spread of rumors and disseminate accurate information.

However, the same forces that encouraged Detroit to become a pioneer in rumor control also facilitated the quick demise of its rumor control center. When the newspaper strike ended in 1968, the information vacuum that the rumor control center so readily filled no longer existed. As people stopped calling into the center to clarify rumors they had overheard, the

center was left fielding racist and speculative calls that contained no actionable intelligence about future riots and could not be meaningfully rebutted by center staff. Moreover, the racial dynamics that plagued Detroit during this period also existed within the DCCR. Director Marks actively contributed to an environment that alienated minority voices on the commission and contributed to the distrust of the institution by the black community—a dynamic enhanced by police control over the rumor control center for much of the week.

Racial tension and violence did not disappear by 1970, but the role of Detroit's rumor control center in addressing these issues had. This disparity is missing from the little literature that exists on these institutions. The sociological approach to rumor control, even in studies that examined rumor control centers in practice, failed to interrogate how these centers always operated within a complex framework of political and historical forces that all influenced the vectors of rumor and rumor control. The sanitized, laboratory-style experiments of Allport and Postman, which undergirded much of the real-world rumor control policy of the 1960s, could never reflect how the World War II context in which their studies were performed shaped the nature of rumor dissemination during their time. Likewise, the policymakers of 1960s America failed to understand the very particular social, political, and historical nexus necessary for the success of rumor control. This nexus existed for a fleeting moment in Detroit, and its unique history of rumor and racial violence enabled it to quickly capitalize on the convergence of these factors. However, the changing historical moment just as quickly left the Detroit rumor control center obsolete.

The importance of the historical moment for the success of Detroit's center also points to several further gaps in scholarship that demand attention. Namely, if Detroit's unique history

was integral to its experience with rumor control, it should be the case that other cities experiences with it are also shaped by their histories. Cities with centers run by nongovernmental organizations or cities that sought to establish spy rings as rumor control all must have their own histories. The Detroit center's structure fell short in part because it was intertwined with the police department; did rumor control centers that were not as involved with the police survive longer? These questions point to a clear direction for further historical research: a comparative history of rumor control. The scope of this paper was necessarily limited by the lack of previous historical work on the phenomenon of rumor control, but further comparative research is clearly needed.

Detroit is an exceptional case study, not the rule. Yes, the center was only highly utilized for a period of five months. Detroit's rumor control center, from its institutional design to its public demand, was never built to be a long-term solution to Detroit's crisis in race relations. However, Detroit also facilitated the national expansion of this novel form of riot prevention to a greater extent than any other city in the country. While the CRS facilitated the national conferences on rumor control, cities looked to Detroit specifically for guidance. As a result, the center's legacy far outlasted its brief period of activity and, in a sense, Detroit fulfilled its pre-riot claim to be the Model City.

Bibliography

42 USC Chapter 21. Sub-Chapter VIII: Community Relations Service. §200g-1: Functions of Service. https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title42/chapter21/subchapter8&edition=prelim.

Allport, Gordon W., and Leo Postman. *The Psychology of Rumor*. Henry Holt & Company: New York, 1947.

American Jewish Committee. *Conference on Mass Media and Race Relations*. Report for the Community Relations Service of the United States Justice Department by the American Jewish Committee. October 17-18, 1967. Jerome P. Cavanagh Papers, Box 453, Folder 3. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit MI.

Babson, Steve. *Working Detroit: The Making of a Union Town.* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986.

Bergesen, Albert. "Race Riots of 1967: An Analysis of Police Violence in Detroit and Newark." *Journal of Black Studies* 12, no. 3 (1982): 261-274.

Bernstein, Paul. "Few Calls: Detroit's Rumor Control Center Slows to Nearly a Standstill." Unidentified newspaper clipping. DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 8. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

"Blacks Patrol in Cleveland: Rain Helps End Disturbance; Whites Banned from Riot Area," *The Michigan Daily* 78, no. 52, July 25, 1968.

Callewaert, Albert, and Arthur Yim. "The Detroit Police Department and the Detroit Civil Disorder." Report by the Mayor's Inspection Team. December 1967. Jerome P. Cavanagh Papers, Box 407, Folder 5. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

Capeci Jr., Dominic J., and Martha Wilkerson. "The Detroit Rioters of 1943: A Reinterpretation." *Michigan Historical Review* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 49-72.

Cavanagh, Jerome P. "Mayor Jerome P. Cavanagh Reports to the People." Text of Television Address Delivered March 7, 1968. DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 7. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

"Check Out Rumors at 963-9550 First." Newspaper clipping. March 16, 1968. DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 7. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

"City of Detroit: Operations Center." Attachment #3. DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series VI, Box 71, Folder 7. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

"City of Detroit: Resource Mobile Units (RMU)." DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series VI, Box 71, Folder 9. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

Community Relations Service. "Rumor Control Conference: Conference on 'The Value of Establishing Rumor Control Centers' Report." June 27-28, 1968. DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 39. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

Darden, Joe T., and Richard W. Thomas. *Detroit: Race Riots, Racial Conflicts, and the Efforts to Bridge the Racial Divide.* East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013.

Davis, Linda, and Clyde Morris. "On the Utility of Rumor." May 21, 1968. DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 6. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

"The Detroit Riots Chronology." No date. Office Files of James C. Gaither, Box 43, "Detroit Riots." The Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas.

"Doctors Report Kennedy Still 'Extremely Critical.'" *The Michigan Daily* 78, no. 24, June 6, 1968.

Edy, Jill. *Troubled Pasts: News and the Collective Memory of Social Unrest*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006.

"Establishing a Rumor Control Center." Memorandum from the Detroit Commission on Community Relations to mayors' offices. No date. DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 39. Walter P. Reuther Library, Detroit, MI.

Executive Order 11365—Establishing a National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. Accessed online at *The American Presidency Project*, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/306428.

"Experience Report." May 1967. Jerome P. Cavanagh Papers, Box 393, Folder 16. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

Fine, Gary Alan, and Patricia A. Turner. *Whispers on the Color Line: Rumor and Race in America.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

Fine, Sidney. *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967.* Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1989.

Flint, Jerry M. “Detroit Sets Up ‘Listening Posts’: System Is Designed to Alert Officials to Racial Unrest.” *New York Times*. Sunday, June 9, 1967. DCCR Collection, Series V, Box 3, Folder 9. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

“Highlights of the Commission Meeting.” Detroit Commission on Community Relations. October 1969. Jerome P. Cavanagh Papers, Box 511, Folder 4. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State Library, Detroit, MI.

Hinton, Elizabeth. “’A War within Our Own Boundaries’: Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society and the Rise of the Carceral State.” *Journal of American History* 102, no. 1 (June 2015): 100-112.

“History of Lynchings.” *NAACP*. https://www.naacp.org/history-of-lynchings/.

Hoover, John Edgar. “Prevention and Control of Mobs and Riots.” Federal Bureau of Investigations, Department of Justice. Aug. 1-Nov. 10, 1967. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, Exhibits to Hearings, Series: (2), Index 1-14, Exhibit #1. The Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, TX.

Inspection of the Detroit Commission on Community Relations. Mayor’s Inspection Team. July 13, 1967. Jerome P. Cavanagh Papers, Box 511, Folder 10. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

The Jerome P. Cavanagh Collection. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, https://reuther.wayne.edu/files/UP000379.pdf.

Kahlenberg, Richard D. “The Inclusive Populism of Robert F. Kennedy.” *The Century Foundation*. March 16, 2018. https://tcf.org/content/report/inclusive-populism-robert-f-kennedy/?session=1.

The Kerner Report. The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.

Knopf, Terry Ann. “Beating the Rumors: An Evaluation of Rumor Control Centers.” *Policy Analysis* 1, no. 4 (Fall 1975): 599-612.

Knopf, Terry Ann. *Race and Rumors of Race.* New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1975.

Landsman, Ron. “Incident Mars Detroit Poor People’s March.” *The Michigan Daily* 78, no. 10, May 14, 1968.

Langois, Janet L. “The Belle Isle Bridge Incident: Legend Dialectic and Semiotic System in the 1943 Detroit Race Riots.” *The Journal of American Folklore* 96, no. 380 (Apr.-Jun. 1983): 183-199.

Lee, Alfred McClung, and Norman Daymond Humphrey. "The Interracial Committee of the City of Detroit." *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 19, no. 5 (Jan. 1946): 278-288.

Letter from Carl E. Heffernan to Richard Marks. August 2, 1968. DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 44. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

Letter from Minoru Yasui to Mayor's Office. National Association of Police Community Relations Officers. May 1970. DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 42. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

Letter from Roland J. Schneider to the Honorable Jerome P. Cavanagh. June 9, 1968. DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 44. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

Levine, Bertram. *Resolving Racial Conflict: The Community Relations Service and Civil Rights, 1964-1989*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005.

"Local Rumor Control Center Handles 10,000 Calls." *The Michigan Chronicle*. July 20, 1968. DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 8. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

Locke, Hubert G. *The Detroit Riot of 1967.* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969.

"Mayor Pulls Out Cleveland Troops." *Augusta Chronicle*. July 25, 1968. Accessed online at *America's Historical Newspapers* on February 26, 2020.

McLaughlin, Malcolm. *The Long Hot Summer of 1967*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014.

Meier, August, and John H. Bracey, Jr. "The NAACP as a Reform Movement, 1909-1965: 'To Reach the Conscience of America.'" *The Journal of Southern History* 59, no. 1 (Feb. 1993): 3-30.

Memorandum for Commission Information and Action from Richard V. Marks, Secretary-Directory. March 11, 1968. DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series VI, Box 71, Folder 7. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

Memorandum for the President from Joe Califano. January 18, 1968. Thursday, 10:30 p.m. White House Central Files, FG 135, Box 185. Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, TX.

Memorandum from Richard V. Marks to Commission on Community Relations. March 15, 1968. DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 16. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

Memorandum to Staff of the Rumor Control Center from Richard V. Marks. March 20, 1968. DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series VI, Box 71, Folder 8. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

"Mob Demands Guns in Detroit." *The Michigan Daily* 78, no. 143, March 21, 1968.

Morris, Aldon D. *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*. New York: The Free Press, 1984.

Moynihan, Daniel P. "Where the American Liberals Went Wrong." *The Sunday Denver Post*. August 13, 1967. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, Series: (29), Selected Substantive Letters Received by the Commission Before Publication of the Report. The Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas.

Odum, Howard W. *Race and Rumors of Race: The American South in the Early Forties.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1943.

Outline for Remarks by Mayor Jerome P. Cavanagh to Suburban Mayors: Thursday, March 14, 1968. March 14, 1968. Jerome P. Cavanagh Papers, Box 407, Folder 6. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

Perez, Anthony Daniel, Kimberly M. Berg, and Daniel J. Myers. "Police and Riots, 1967-1969." *Journal of Black Studies* 34, no. 2 (2003): 153-182.

Phillips, Jason. "The Grape Vine Telegraph: Rumors and Confederate Persistence." *The Journal of Southern History* 72, no. 4 (Nov. 2006): 753-788.

Ponting, J. Rick. "Rumor Control Centers: Their Emergence and Operations." *American Behavioral Scientist* 16, no. 3 (1973): 391-401.

Remarks by Mayor Jerome P. Cavanagh before the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, Tuesday, August 15, 1967, 10:00 A.M. In *APPEARANCE OF THE CITY OF DETROIT BEFORE THE PRESIDENT'S NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMISSION ON CIVIL DISORDERS.* August 15, 1967. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, Series 17, Box 4, "Detroit Survey, July-September 1967: Detroit Urban Data; Mayor Cavanagh's Report." Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas.

Risen, Clay. *A Nation on Fire: America in the Wake of the King Assassination*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2009.

Rumor Calls CCR. DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71-72, Folder 8. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

"Rumor Center Seeks to Keep Detroit Cool." *The Milwaukee Journal*. March 31, 1968. DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 8. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

Rumor Central: Memorandum to Mayors' Offices. Commission on Human Relations, City of Chicago. DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 39. Walter P. Reuther Library, Detroit, MI.

RUMOR CONTROL CENTER. April 17, 1968. DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 8. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

Rumor Report Sheet. Rumor #5. March 8, 1968. DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 10. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

"Rumor, Tension, and Incident Control." Memorandum from Richard V. Marks to Commission Information and Action. Detroit Commission on Community Relations. March 11, 1968. DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 7. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

Schneider, Cathy Lisa. *Police Power and Race Riots: Urban Unrest in Paris and New York*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014.

Shibutani, Tamotsu. *Improvised News: A Sociological Study of Rumor.* Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966.

"Six Dead: Guard Called into Cleveland." *The Michigan Daily* 78, no. 51, July 24, 1968.

Smith, David C., and Jack Martin. "Presses Roll After 267 Days." *Detroit Free Press* 138, no. 97, August 10, 1968.

Sugrue, Thomas J. *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

Sugrue, Thomas J. *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North*. New York: Random House, 2008.

"Supplement on Control of Disorder." Part IV: Supplement and Appendices. Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. Accessed through HeinOnline.

To Secure These Rights: Final Report of the President's Committee on Civil Rights. https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/to-secure-these-rights#139.

Tolnay, Stewart Emory, and E.M. Beck. *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992.

Tuttle, William M. *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1970.

Unger, Irwin. *The Best of Intentions: The Triumphs and Failures of the Great Society Under Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon*. New York: Doubleday, 1996.

United States Commission on Civil Rights. *Hearings Before the United States Commission on Civil Rights.* Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1960.

Weinberg, Sanford B., and Ritch K. Eich. "Fighting Fire with Fire: Establishment of a Rumor Control Center." *Communication Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (1978): 26-31.

Wells, Robert L. "Cavanagh Urges Activity to Avert Summer Trouble." May 2, 1967. DCCR Collection, Series V, Box 3, Folder 7. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

White, Walter, and Thurgood Marshall. *What Caused the Detroit Riot?: An Analysis.* New York: NAACP, 1943.

Whitney, B. "The Detroit Community Barometer." January 30, 1945. DCCR Collection, Series I, Box 9, Folder 14. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

Yasui, Minoru. "A Study of 'Rumor Control' or Information Centers in Major Cities of the United States." National Association of Police Community Relations Officers. June 30, 1970. DCCR Collection, Part 3, Series 6, Box 71, Folder 43. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

Young, Stephen, Alasdair Pinkerton, and Klaus Dodds. "The Word on the Street: Rumor, 'Race,' and the Anticipation of Urban Unrest." *Political Geography* 38 (Jan. 2014): 57-67.