



“The Trouble with a Commission”

Date: 1968-03-13

Conversation: WH6803-02-12812-12813

Participant: Lyndon B. Johnson

Participant: Richard J. Daley

Start Time: 22:49

Duration: 01:51

Place: Mansion

SCENE SETTER: Speaking with Chicago mayor Richard J. “Dick” Daley, President Johnson revealed his frustration with the Kerner Commission’s report on civil disturbances. The report rejected the notion, which Johnson had come to accept, that organized agitators were the primary cause of disorder. In this call, Johnson also defended the money he had spent already on urban renewal.

President Johnson: Every time you appoint one of these committees, you get more than you can do anything about.

For instance, I—Kennedy—[John F.] Jack Kennedy spent 9 billion [dollars] on the cities in his last federal budget in '64. This year I've got 22 [billion] in there. [*Daley acknowledges.*] Yet [Robert F.] Bobby [Kennedy] [D—New York] says I'm not doing enough. Yet the Congress is going to cut about 5 [billion] out of what I've got, and I'm fighting to hold it.

The Kerner Commission made a very exhaustive study and spent a couple of million dollars, but they recommended that I spend 80 million, and I got no place to get the 80. [*Daley acknowledges.*] I can't borrow it. I can't tax it. I can't get a tax bill of any kind, and they didn't discuss that. That's a detail they didn't get into. And Bobby just gave me hell today for not carrying out the Kerner Commission study. Well, I didn't realize when I appointed [Otto J.] Kerner [Jr.] that this son of a bitch from New York, [John V.] Lindsay, would take charge.

Richard J. “Dick” Daley: Yeah.

President Johnson: He did take charge—

Daley: Yes, he did.

President Johnson: —and he recommended I hire 2 and a half million people on federal payroll. And I just—I've not wanted to reflect on Kerner and criticize the commission. At the same time, I couldn't embrace it, because I've got a budget. When I came in, Kennedy had a budget of 97 billion [dollars]. My budget tonight's 187 [billion dollars].

Daley: Yeah.

President Johnson: Now, that's what's happened in four years. And I got to have some fiscal solvency, and I can't have it unless I have a tax bill. But Bobby said today that I'm not doing enough for the cities. Well, I want to do everything a human can if they'll give me any money. But, now, the trouble with a commission—you appoint one and, my gosh, they're liable to recommend to you something that you'll have to turn over and knock down. It'll hurt you worse unless you're careful.

End of excerpt.

CITATION: "Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard J. Daley on 13 March 1968," Conversation WH6803-02-12812-12813, *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition* [Johnson Telephone Tapes: 1968, ed. Kent B. Germany, Nicole Hemmer, and Ken Hughes] (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014–). URL: <http://prde.upress.virginia.edu/conversations/4005962>

This conversation was transcribed by the [Miller Center's Presidential Recordings Program](#) with the generous support of the [National Historical Publications and Records Commission](#).

Full information about this conversation: ["The Trouble with a Commission"](#)