

# “A War within Our Own Boundaries”: Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society and the Rise of the Carceral State

Elizabeth Hinton

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Over the five summers of Lyndon B. Johnson’s presidency, the nation witnessed more than 250 incidents of urban civil disorder. The violence—termed *riots* by policy makers, journalists, and the public—swept American cities and resulted in the deaths of more than two hundred black Americans, thirteen thousand injured civilians and officers, and the destruction of billions of dollars worth of property. Beginning with the killing of an unarmed black fifteen-year-old boy by New York City police that sparked the Harlem riot in July 1964, the uprisings constituted a prolonged and sporadic conflict involving more than one hundred thousand black participants and law enforcement officials. By the close of the 1960s these uprisings—sparked not by white hostility to integration like earlier race riots but by the presence of exploitative and exclusionary institutions in black neighborhoods—constituted the greatest period of domestic bloodshed the nation had witnessed since the Civil War.<sup>1</sup>

Unprecedented in its fury and frequency, this disorder radically reshaped the direction of Johnson’s Great Society programs, resulting ultimately in a merger of antipoverty programs with anticrime programs that laid the groundwork for contemporary mass incarceration. The links that the fire of urban discord forged between the fighting of crime and the fighting of urban inequality were established as early as 1965, in the three pieces of legislation that represented the Johnson administration’s legislative response to the civil rights movement. In March of that year, the administration presented to Congress the

Elizabeth Hinton is an assistant professor of history and African and African American studies at Harvard University.

I am deeply indebted to Heather Thompson and Eric Foner for their insights and mentorship. Heather in particular has generously offered advice on numerous drafts of this article, and I am grateful for her challenges and encouragement. I must also thank Ira Katznelson, Julilly Kohler-Hausmann, Khalil Muhammad, Donna Murch, Mae Ngai, and Vesla Weaver for advancing my thinking on this subject.

Readers may contact Hinton at [ehinton@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:ehinton@fas.harvard.edu).

<sup>1</sup> These figures are compiled from Senate Committee on Government Operations, *Riots, Civil and Criminal Disorders: Hearings before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations on Riots*, 90 Cong., 1 sess., Nov. 1, 2, 3, 6, 1967; Lemberg Center for the Study of Violence, *Riot Data Review* (no. 1, May 1968); *ibid.* (no. 2, Aug. 1968); *ibid.* (no. 3, Feb. 1969); and Otto Kerner et al., *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York, 1968), 6, 35–108. Notable historical treatments in the expansive literature on the riots include Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (East Lansing, 2007); Robert M. Fogelson, *Violence as Protest: A Study of Riots and Ghettos* (Garden City, 1971); Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (Charlottesville, 1995); Michael B. Katz, *Why Don’t American Cities Burn?* (Philadelphia, 2011); and Kevin Mumford, *Newark: A History of Race, Rights, and Riots in America* (New York, 2007).



Policemen attack a man at 133rd Street and Seventh Avenue during the Harlem uprising in July 1964. *Photograph by Dick DeMarsico. Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.*

Housing and Urban Development Act, which subsidized private homes for low-income renters; the Voting Rights Act, which gave black Americans in the South the opportunity to participate in the electoral process as full citizens; and the Law Enforcement Assistance Act, which broke with two hundred years of national policy and established federal influence over local police operations. Reflecting on these three bills, and on already-operating programs such as Job Corps, Head Start, and Youth Opportunity Centers, Johnson declared his hope that 1965 would be remembered not as the apex of American liberal reform but rather “as the year when this country began a thorough, intelligent, and effective war against crime.” A new era in American law enforcement had begun.<sup>2</sup>

These and other measures blended the opportunity, development, and training programs of the War on Poverty with the surveillance, patrol, and detention programs of Johnson's newly declared “War on Crime.” This entanglement of Great Society policies allowed law enforcement officials to use methods of surveillance that overlapped with social programs—for instance, antidelinquency measures framed as equal opportunity initiatives—to effectively suffuse crime-control strategies into the everyday lives of Americans in segregated and impoverished communities. In time, the entire spectrum of domestic

<sup>2</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, “Statement by the President on Establishing the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice,” July 26, 1965, *American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=27110>.

social programs actively participated in national law enforcement, thereby pushing the boundaries of the carceral state beyond penal institutions. By the time Johnson's Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act passed in 1968, the carceral state had already begun to metastasize into a vast network of social programs originally created to combat racial exclusion and inequality. In response to rioting, however, these programs had shifted in purpose toward controlling the violent symptoms of socioeconomic problems. Ironically and tragically, as antipoverty and anticrime initiatives became increasingly entwined, neither the political coalition that privileged the "forgotten civil right" to safety nor the black activists who sought equality and full democracy realized the society they imagined.<sup>3</sup>

Scholars have recognized the role of the riots in mobilizing white backlash and the subsequent rise of conservatism, moving liberal sympathizers away from egalitarian policy, and precipitating the federal government's retreat from progressive social reform. Yet the threat the uprisings posed to American law and institutions also needs to be understood as the central catalyst behind the punitive turn in twentieth-century domestic policy. Remembering Johnson's presidency for its monumental civil rights legislation and social welfare initiatives, historians and political scientists tend to explain his embrace of the politics of "law and order" as an electoral tactic: a reappropriation of Barry Goldwater's platform during the 1964 presidential contest and a necessary concession made to the emerging coalition of southern Democrats and western Republicans to secure the enactment of antipoverty and civil rights bills. Thus, Richard M. Nixon is usually credited for spearheading the War on Crime, even though he inherited an already-vibrant law enforcement infrastructure created by the Johnson administration. Far from being ambivalent about crime control as a major aim of domestic policy, Johnson and his radical domestic programs laid the foundation of the carceral state, opening an entirely new plane of domestic social programs centered on crime control, surveillance, and incarceration.<sup>4</sup>

The turn toward substituting confinement for opportunity programs resulted both from the urgency created by the rising disorder and from the way that Johnson and allied policy makers understood urban citizens' decision to respond to their conditions with

<sup>3</sup> Works that similarly understand the carceral state as a network of programs strongly tied to the welfare state include David Garland, *Punishment and Welfare: A History of Penal Strategies* (London, 1985); David Garland, *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society* (Chicago, 2002); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York, 1977); Julilly Kohler-Hausmann, "Guns and Butter: The Welfare State, the Carceral State, and the Politics of Exclusion in the Postwar United States," *Journal of American History*, 102 (June 2015), 87–99; and Loïc Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (Durham, N.C., 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Byrne Edsall and Mary D. Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (New York, 1991); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, 2002); Michael B. Katz, ed., *The "Underclass" Debate: Views from History* (Princeton, 1993); and Michael B. Katz, *The Underserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare* (New York, 1990); Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, 2006); Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993); Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York, 2008); Jill Quadagno, *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty* (New York, 1994); Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974–2008* (New York, 2008). Placing race at the center of her analysis, Vesla M. Weaver breaks from the dominant view and describes the rise of federal crime-control policies as a "frontlash" to the upheaval of the "second reconstruction." See Vesla M. Weaver, "Frontlash: Race and the Development of Punitive Crime Policy," *Studies in American Political Development*, 21 (Fall 2007), 230–65. On the politics of crime control, see James D. Calder, "Presidents and Crime Control: Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon and the Influences of Ideology," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 12 (Fall 1982), 574–89; Michael W. Flamm, *Law and Order: Street Crime, Civil Unrest, and the Crisis of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York, 2005); Katherine Beckett, *Making Crime Pay: Law and Order in Contemporary American Politics* (New York, 1997); and Naomi Murakawa, *The First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America* (New York, 2014).

violence. Johnson and many other liberals recognized poverty as the root cause of crime, but following Daniel Moynihan's hugely influential 1965 report, "The Negro Family," they also viewed community behavior and not structural exclusion as the cause of that poverty. To the policy makers reshaping American law enforcement, crime was an innate problem of black urban America, and—like a Soviet nuclear strike—something that might be targeted before it began if policy makers and foot soldiers possessed the proper tools. For example, two days after the Watts riot of August 1965 subsided and senators prepared for the upcoming vote on the Law Enforcement Assistance Act, Senate Judiciary Committee chair Roman Hruska told Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach: "For some time, it has been my feeling that the task of law enforcement agencies is really not much different from military forces; namely, to deter crime before it occurs, just as our military objective is deterrence of aggression." The War on Crime and its targeting of "pathologically" poor black communities, in other words, resulted as much from fears over rising crime rates as from the clearly articulated decision to manage urban crisis with punitive measures meant to deter further uprisings. With these arguments on politicians' minds, and with American cities still smoldering from another summer of rioting, the Law Enforcement Assistance Act of 1965 won unanimous support in Congress.<sup>5</sup>

Unlike the previous two centuries of crime-control legislation, this act created direct funding channels between the federal government and the criminal justice system at large, and it emphasized training and experimental programs for urban police forces serving low-income communities. Johnson intended police departments to be the primary beneficiaries of the newly available funds because he saw urban policemen as the "frontline soldier" of the national law enforcement program. "We are today fighting a war within our own boundaries," the president believed. In a time of frequent unrest, police officers endangered their lives every day, "just as the man does in the rice paddies of Vietnam." As such, under the direction of Katzenbach, the Office of Law Enforcement Assistance (OLEA) invested the vast majority of the federal crime-control funds in local police departments, private firms, and social science researchers working to improve urban surveillance and patrol strategies. By the end of its first year of funding, the OLEA had spent nearly \$7 million on eighty-three projects in thirty states.<sup>6</sup>

The most intensive program of the OLEA unfolded in Washington, D.C., which had evolved into a majority black city with one of the highest rates of reported crime in the

<sup>5</sup> On the role of social science research in shaping domestic social programs, see Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton, 2001). Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action," 1965, in *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy: A Trans-action Social Science and Public Policy Report*, ed. Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancey (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), 41–124. On "The Negro Family" and its impact on the Johnson administration, see also Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York, 2005), 1–24; James T. Patterson, *Freedom Is Not Enough: The Moynihan Report and America's Struggle over Black Family Life from LBJ to Obama* (New York, 2010), ix–xvii; and Rainwater and Yancey, *Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy*. Roman Hruska to Nicholas Katzenbach, Aug. 19, 1965, in Senate Judiciary Committee, *Report on the Law Enforcement Assistance Act of 1965*, 89th Cong., Sen. Rep. No., 672, 1965, p. 4. The House authorized the Law Enforcement Assistance Act of 1965 by a 326–0 roll call vote on August 2, and the Senate approved it on September 8 without opposition. See "Law Enforcement Training," *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 21 (1965), 634–35.

<sup>6</sup> On the evolution of the American carceral state from the early republic to the twentieth century, see Marie Gottschalk, *The Prison and the Gallows: The Politics of Mass Incarceration in America* (New York, 2006); and Rebecca M. McLennan, *The Crisis of Imprisonment: Protest, Politics, and the Making of the American Penal State, 1776–1941* (New York, 2008). Office of the White House Press Secretary, "Remarks of the President before the International Association of Chiefs of Police, Kansas City, Missouri," Sept. 14, 1967, press release, 1967 Crime Message Follow Up 2 of 3 folder, box 4, Legislative Background Files—Safe Streets and Crime Control Act of 1968 (Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library and Museum, Austin, Tex.). Katzenbach to Lyndon B. Johnson, July 28, 1966, "Volume IV, LEA Part V, LEA—Documentary Supplement [2 of 2]" folder, box 3, LBJ Administrative Histories, volume IV, parts 5 and 5a, Department of Justice, *ibid.*

nation by the mid-1960s. To ensure the safety of high government officials who worked in the troubled city, Johnson promised to give the nation's capital "the best police force in the United States." Perhaps more importantly, this program was also an endeavor that Katzenbach and his staff could easily monitor. The earliest OLEA grants went to the Washington, D.C., police department, which received a combined total of \$890,000 (equivalent to more than \$6.5 million today) in 1966 alone. African American men between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four constituted the single largest group of residents arrested during the national uprisings, and growing numbers of policy makers and law enforcement officials came to view this demographic as prone to rioting and, by extension, to criminality. Evoking race in race-neutral terms, Johnson pledged: "We're not going to tolerate hoodlums who kill and rape and mug in this city." The funds would assist the Washington police force in controlling and supervising this troubling demographic to restore public safety. First and foremost on the agenda was putting more officers with better equipment on the streets of black neighborhoods in the city. The substantial OLEA grant bought local law enforcement sixteen new station wagons, three patrol wagons, twenty-five motor scooters for a roving neighborhood patrol squad, thirty-six scout cars, walkie-talkie radios for patrolmen on foot, eighty new detectives, and 271 additional police officers.<sup>7</sup>

Elsewhere, the OLEA worked with local law enforcement to develop new technologies to ground preemptive law enforcement methods in statistical knowledge. Federal policy makers and law enforcement officials were generally unwilling to challenge the widely held belief that only increased patrol in segregated urban areas could prevent crime, assuming that disorder could be contained simply by increasing the presence of law enforcement on the streets. The Johnson administration was committed to assisting local police departments in modernizing their data-gathering capabilities, which would allow them to build criminal profiles of residents and therefore target street patrols more effectively. In St. Louis, law enforcement personnel fed crime statistics into a machine to "show where and when particular types of crime are likely to occur and help police decide where patrols should be concentrated." Officers could then effectively swoop into targeted neighborhoods and apprehend offenders. Similarly, the Philadelphia police department received computerized crime prediction programs to target street patrols based on *anticipated* crime. By treating urban crime as a scientific phenomenon that could be predicted and contained, these and other programs further rationalized the concentrated deployment of police officers in black communities.<sup>8</sup>

Beyond helping police departments increase patrols in segregated urban areas and acquire criminal knowledge about the residents in these areas, the Johnson administration wanted to support police in building their weapons arsenals in preparation for the ever-looming

<sup>7</sup> Alfred E. Lewis, "LBJ Names City Crime Commission," *Washington Post*, July 17, 1965, pp. A1, A5. Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, *LEAA Grants and Contracts Fiscal 1966–1968* (Washington, 1968), 1–2. Nancy E. Marion, *A History of Federal Crime Control Initiatives, 1960–1993* (Westport, 1994), 51; Leonard Downie Jr., "Police Explain 'Dick Tracy' Radio Plans," *Washington Post*, March 12, 1966, p. B2.

<sup>8</sup> Khalil Muhammad has shown how crime statistics grounded the links between black Americans and criminality in the popular and political imagination from emancipation onward, driving gross racial disparities in American policing and incarceration practices. See Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010). James Vorenberg to Joseph Califano, Dec. 3, 1966, memo, p. 7, "Folder 1, 1966–67 Task Force on Crime," box 1, Legislative Background Files; Kerner et al., *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 306. U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on the Judiciary, *Law Enforcement Assistance Act of 1965: Hearing before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary*, 89 Cong., 1 sess., July 22, 1965, p. 8.

threat of unrest. Katzenbach and his staff focused on supplying urban police departments with bulletproof vests, machine guns, and armored vehicles as riot-prevention measures. Much of this military-grade equipment had been introduced in overseas interventions and urban uprisings at home. Helicopters, for instance, had performed strongly during the Watts riot, and in June 1966 the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department received nearly \$200,000—the largest single grant the OLEA awarded to local law enforcement—for an air-surveillance program called Project Sky Knight. By the early 1970s, the federal government had purchased helicopters for departments in fifty other cities.<sup>9</sup>

As the Johnson administration shored up support for the War on Crime during the early stages of the War on Poverty, liberal policy makers remained sympathetic to housing, employment, education, and social welfare programs. But “because the anchor of society must be an abiding respect for law and order,” as Johnson said in his remarks upon signing the Law Enforcement Assistance Act, crime control occupied an increasing amount of the administration's attention. During the first half of the 1960s, antipoverty programs expanded the degree of federal influence in the everyday lives of black urban Americans. By fashioning a new liberal synthesis that brought crime-control strategies under the fold of social welfare programs, federal policy makers eased the shift toward national punitive programs in the second half of the decade.<sup>10</sup>

With the first OLEA programs up and running in the fall of 1966, White House staff sought what they called a “middle ground” between both urban interventions. To do so, federal policy makers and officials linked new law enforcement measures to existing urban social institutions. Even though Johnson officials maintained that the War on Poverty offered a long-term solution to the root cause of crime, they concluded that “it is necessary to proceed with a program of criminal justice” and expected federal social welfare agencies to integrate the administration's law enforcement strategies into their programming.<sup>11</sup>

As one of the most ambitious initiatives of the Johnson administration, the Model Cities program is particularly illustrative of the ways the carceral state took shape inside the Great Society. Under the purview of the newly created Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966 authorized \$2.3 billion in grants to “improve the quality of urban life” in racially marginalized communities throughout the United States. Policy makers imagined that the program would redevelop vulnerable areas by creating communities in which living quarters, health clinics, education facilities, and recreation centers, all in close proximity to one another, would function as a cohesive system. The program enlarged the scope of federal urban intervention from public housing projects to entire communities. Strong opposition from municipal authorities to the controversial community-action and

<sup>9</sup> On the militarization of urban police, see Radley Balko, *The Rise of the Warrior Cop: The Militarization of America's Police Forces* (New York, 2013); Stephen Graham, *Cities under Siege: The New Military Urbanism* (New York, 2010); and Christian Parenti, *Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis* (New York, 2000). “Granting Activity 1965–1966,” 1968, typescript, p. 42, “Volume IV, LEA Part V, LEA—Narrative History [1 of 2]” folder, box 3, LBJ Administrative Histories, volume IV, parts 5 and 5a (Johnson Library). “Administrative History of the Department of Justice,” 1968, typescript, Administrative History of the Department of Justice folder, *ibid.*; “Project Sky Knight: A Demonstration in Aerial Surveillance and Crime Control,” 1968, pamphlet, Egil Krogh Files (Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, Calif.); Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, *LEAA Grants and Contracts Fiscal 1966–1968*, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, “Statement by the President Following the Signing of Law Enforcement Assistance Bills,” Sept. 22, 1965, in *Public Papers of Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965* (Washington, 1966), 526.

<sup>11</sup> “Meeting on Crime-Justice 1967 Legislation,” Aug. 18, 1966, typescript, with Katzenbach, Clark, Vinson, Vorenberg, Jordan, Califano, Gaither, “Folder 2, 1966–67 Task Force on Crime II,” box 1, Legislative Background Files.

mobilization programs had stained the administration, and Model Cities marked a decisive retreat from the principle of “maximum feasible participation” by community members that guided early War on Poverty programs. Instead of funding autonomous grassroots organizations, Model Cities institutionalized community-based antipoverty efforts and put local service professionals in charge of general administration.<sup>12</sup>

Like many of the other antipoverty measures of the Great Society, the Model Cities program created new spaces in racially marginalized communities—under the aegis of fighting social exclusion—into which law enforcement programs smoothly entered. Three months after the program’s launch, Johnson encouraged federal officials to “take advantage of our Model Cities program—the most comprehensive urban development program this country has ever undertaken—to promote the effective goal of law enforcement.” The president directed HUD secretary Robert Weaver to cooperate with the newly appointed attorney general Ramsey Clark to “plan ahead for law enforcement in a new environment” and “create safe streets in safe neighborhoods.” The administration quickly imposed a statutory mandate requiring police, court, probation, and legal services to participate in the Model Cities program alongside social welfare agencies. In conjunction with job counseling and after-school programs, the sixty-three Model Cities communities would include new precincts, police-training centers, service bureaus for adjudicated youth, probation and legal services, and police-community relations programs.<sup>13</sup>

Soon, Model Cities areas evolved into important sites for radical new approaches to crime control. Police professionalization efforts in the postwar period had encouraged officers to patrol communities in motorized vehicles, but in “high-crime” urban areas this approach seemed to create a large disconnect between the police and the community by the mid-1960s. The federal government’s “team policing” programs, which were first tested in Model Cities areas, marked a return to foot patrol in targeted neighborhoods. A forerunner to the community policing methods that many departments serving low-income areas embraced in the mid-1970s, team policing decentralized authority and empowered officers to exercise greater discretion in segregated urban neighborhoods. On foot, beat police could prevent future crime by ingratiating themselves into community life, and, in doing so, identify and arrest suspects with greater ease.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> On the Model Cities program and the shift in the Johnson administration’s antipoverty policy, see Bernard J. Friedan and Marshall Kaplan, *The Politics of Neglect: Urban Aid from Model Cities to Revenue Sharing* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975); and Judson L. James, “Federalism and the Model Cities Experiment,” *Publius*, 2 (Spring 1972), 69–94. Eugene Doleschal, “Criminal Justice Programs in Model Cities,” *Crime and Delinquency Literature*, 4 (June 1972), reprinted in House Committee on the Judiciary, *Community Anticrime Assistance Act of 1973: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Crime of the Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives, Ninety-Third Congress, Second Session on H.R. 9175, H.R. 9809, and H.R. 1060, Community Anticrime Assistance Act of 1973, Part 2*, 93 Cong., 2 sess., Feb. 21, 1974, p. 142.

<sup>13</sup> Almost immediately after the program’s inception, Justice Department officials recognized that “the Model Cities climate and administrative machinery are ideally suited to encourage new criminal justice and crime prevention programs.” See Crime Commission executive director Vorenberg to director of Model Cities Administration Walter F. Farr Jr., “Re: Examples of Crime Commission Recommendations Relevant to Model Cities Program,” May 25, 1967, memo, “Folder 2, 1966–67 Task Force on Crime II,” box 1, Legislative Background Files. Lyndon B. Johnson, “Special Message to the Congress on Crime and Law Enforcement: ‘To Insure the Public Safety,’” Feb. 7, 1968, in *Public Papers of Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1968–1969* (Washington, 1970), 59.

<sup>14</sup> Crime-control measures took on an even greater significance in Model Cities during the Nixon administration before the program was dissolved in 1974. By the fall of 1971, 139 Model Cities sites had completed, established, or were about to initiate nearly 500 programs related to crime and delinquency. The Department of Housing and Urban Development had devoted more than \$50 million to criminal justice programs in Model Cities, with an additional \$35 million coming from the Department of Justice. See Vorenberg to Farr, May 25, 1967, “Re: Examples of Crime Commission Recommendations Relevant to Model Cities Program”; Doleschal, “Criminal Justice Programs in Model Cities,” 146–47, 159.

Model Cities and similar programs also fostered additional police surveillance by giving officers a role in administering social programs in the community. In Washington, D.C., where the ninety-two-acre Model Cities area served some ninety thousand residents on the northeast side of the city, the Office of Economic Opportunity's Model Precinct Program called for the joint management of Neighborhood Service Centers by police, providing the officers training in what a reporter described as "ghetto lifestyles, the law and techniques for improved community relations." These and other combined efforts to improve the delivery of federal social programs both cut costs and coordinated domestic policies pursuing antipoverty and anticrime goals in blighted neighborhoods.<sup>15</sup>

Since all Great Society programs were expected to include, in Johnson's words, "a well-designed program for [crime] prevention and control," in the wake of the Law Enforcement Assistance Act, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) and the Department of Labor joined the OLEA in professionalizing law enforcement and controlling delinquency. As with Model Cities, even when agencies did not explicitly limit their programming to delinquent youth, they still worked toward the goal of combating and treating juvenile delinquency. The Johnson administration inherited that goal from the HEW and Labor Departments of the Kennedy administration, which originally developed federal youth employment and community mobilization programs. As an official from the Department of Labor described the effort in a memo to Johnson's Task Force on Crime, the Youth Development Program was meant to "provide extensive support for programs designed to meet the needs of youth in general with a heavy emphasis in slum areas, where delinquency is highest." Implemented exclusively in "high risk delinquency areas," the Youth Development program sought to provide cultural activities and skill-building workshops to "identified problem youth." This constituency was also the focus of HEW's Work Related Training Program, which provided vocational training and remedial education to "enable delinquents and potential youthful offenders to gain employment." Policy makers and program officials believed this effort would "keep these individuals from becoming dependent on State support, and from becoming criminals." Because many politicians and local authorities worried that black youth would revolt at any moment, in practice this mix of social welfare and social control imperatives imposed a soft form of surveillance in vulnerable and isolated communities.<sup>16</sup>

As the federal government increased its investment in fighting crime and pulled back from social welfare programs, law enforcement continued to try to fill the void left behind by the many promising War on Poverty programs that were shuttered during the second half of the 1960s. In Washington, D.C., for example, the police department opened neighborhood police stations inside the National Capital Authority Projects on the southeast side of the city beginning in 1967. One center moved into a space in a first-floor suite of the housing project that had previously housed a health clinic serving residents. Open eight hours a day and five days a week, the new recreational center gave youth access to a pool table, a record player, and a library filled with police pamphlets and medical literature left behind by the previous occupants. Washington, D.C., Public Safety director Patrick Murphy believed that the presence of the force would "reduce tension and diminish the possibility of disorder." Facilitating opportunities for positive communication

<sup>15</sup> Peter Braestrup, "Barry Pushes Citizen Control of Police Plan," *Washington Post*, Aug. 15, 1969, p. C2. Carl Bernstein, "Model Precinct Plan Suspended by Mayor," *ibid.*, April 19, 1969, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Johnson, "Special Message to the Congress on Crime and Law Enforcement." Untitled, undated document, pp. 12, 14, 16, "Folder 1, 1966-67 Task Force on Crime," box 1, Legislative Background Files. Assistant Secretary for Individual Family Services Lisle C. Carter Jr. to Califano, *ibid.*



between residents and law enforcement officers soon became more a salient and immediate riot-prevention goal than a means of maintaining social programs.<sup>17</sup>

These examples begin to demonstrate that the health, housing, education, and training programs of the War on Poverty eventually gave way to providing momentary recreation to improve police-community relations during the War on Crime. In addition to assigning police patrols to public schools during this period, law enforcement officials provided additional supervision in after-school programs and during the summer months. Shortly after the Watts uprising, the Los Angeles Police Department sponsored grand outings for some twenty-five thousand disadvantaged youth to sporting, professional, and entertainment venues. Similarly, during the summer of 1966 in New York City, the Police Athletic League instituted a Playstreet Program with additional support from the National Recreation and Park Association and the sports equipment manufacturer AMF. The program offered bowling, golf, punching bags, tetherball, dome climbers, and horseshoes to low-income children and teenagers. By providing urban youth with such opportunities, law enforcement programs created a space where police could, in a wholly benevolent manner, monitor young people who seemed vulnerable to disorder and delinquency.<sup>18</sup>

Johnson and federal policy makers had ushered in a national law enforcement program to staunch the bleeding in American cities. Yet, in the end, shifting the trajectory of postwar liberal reform toward surveillance had the opposite effect: increased police presence on the streets, in the sky, and within schools and housing projects further inflamed violent civil disorder. When urban police forces became militarized and police officers increasingly assumed the role of social service providers during the first two years of the War on Crime, black residents and activists responded by becoming more confrontational. Police brutality and law enforcement practices had long shaped black urban life, but the formation of the Black Panther party in 1966 and other organizations calling for community control and armed self-defense were, in no small part, a response to the Great Society and the law enforcement programs that arose within it. Urban civil disorder only escalated during the War on Crime era, culminating in the unprecedented destruction and black civilian casualties in Newark and Detroit during the summer of 1967 and the riots in 125 cities following the murder of Martin Luther King Jr. in April 1968.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> On the Johnson administration's disinvestment from community action programs, see Susan Abrams Beck, "The Limits of Presidential Activism: Lyndon Johnson and the Implementation of the Community Action Program," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 17 (Summer 1987), 541–57; Stephen M. David, "Leadership of the Poor in Poverty Programs," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science*, 29 (no. 1, 1968), 86–100; O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, 166–95; Francis Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York, 1973); Rhonda Y. Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women's Struggles against Urban Inequality* (New York, 2004). Patrick Murphy quoted in "2d Neighborhood Center Opened by D.C. Police," *Washington Post*, Sept. 7, 1968, p. B2.

<sup>18</sup> By the fall of 1968, for instance, the Los Angeles Police Department came into contact with some 8,000 students a week. According to the department's Community Relations Program report, police and school officials agreed that having armed officers on campus was "invaluable in creating a sense of concern for orderly behavior and responsibility for the maintenance of law and order." See "Los Angeles Police Department Community Relations Program—Youth Services Material," Nov. 1968, typescript, p. 2, box 26, Krogh Files. "Portable Playstreets: An Answer to the Long Hot Summers," 1967, brochure, "Cabinet Meeting 8/2/67 [3 of 4]" folder, box 9, Cabinet Papers (Johnson Library).

<sup>19</sup> On the relationship between local law enforcement practices and the emergence of the Black Panthers, see Donna Jean Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill, 2010). On the politics of armed self-defense in the urban North in this period, see Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin Jr., *Black against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley, 2013); Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity* (Baltimore, 2005); Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York, 2007); Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction and Beyond in Black America, 1945–2006* (Jackson, 2007); and Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Movements in America* (New York, 1997).



An emergency meeting in the Oval Office is held as news of the Detroit uprising arrives on July 24, 1967. From left to right are President Lyndon B. Johnson on the telephone, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, Domestic Counsel Joseph Califano, Federal Bureau of Investigation director J. Edgar Hoover, Secretary of the Army Stanley Resor, and Gen. Harold Johnson. *Photograph by Yoichi Okamoto. Courtesy Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library.*

In response, and with federal policy makers still operating under the assumption that black urban poverty was endemic and preventable with a sufficient show of force, Johnson passed his final piece of major domestic legislation. The capstone of his Great Society, the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act (1968), accelerated the expansion of the carceral state by financially incentivizing and at times specifically requiring state and local authorities to increase surveillance and patrols in already-targeted black urban neighborhoods. Whereas the Office of Economic Opportunity at the center of the War on Poverty never grew into a larger, more permanent agency, the 1968 act expanded the OLEA into the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA). Whereas federal-local partnerships had steered postwar social policies, Congress introduced the block-grant system into domestic programs via the LEAA, which granted the vast majority of crime-control funds to states, effectively restoring to them a degree of autonomy that was threatened by the dismantling of Jim Crow. And whereas the American criminal justice and law enforcement systems had previously focused on punishing offenders and preventing crime, following the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act the underlying principle of these systems shifted to management and control within isolated and marginalized communities.<sup>20</sup>

The Johnson administration had spent two years funding research and demonstration programs to create a blueprint for a national law enforcement program amenable to

<sup>20</sup> Garland, *Culture of Control*; Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley, 2007); Jonathan Simon, *Governing through Crime: How the War on Crime Transformed American Democracy and Created a Culture of Fear* (New York, 2009); Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor*. Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, Pub. L. 90-351, 82 Stat. 197 (1968).



President Lyndon B. Johnson views riot damage aboard a helicopter flying over Washington, D.C., on April 7, 1968. *Photograph by Frank Wolfe. Courtesy White House Photo Office, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library.*

Congress, and the 1968 act enshrined for wider implementation many of the OLEA experiments. Under the new legislation, the federal government financially encouraged states to acquire surplus M-1 military carbines, army tanks, bulletproof vests, and walkie-talkies for local police by covering up to 90 percent of the costs of riot-prevention programs, which were defined broadly. And despite the reputation of the OLEA's antiriot squads for harassing black activists and imposing stop-and-frisk searches on young residents, Congress promoted such units by authorizing the LEAA to cover 75 percent of their cost. In contrast to these hardware and patrol programs, the federal government agreed to cover only 40 percent of the expenses incurred by police-community relations programs. As suaging tensions between the majority white police forces and the racially marginalized communities they patrolled was not a priority, even though policy makers and law enforcement officials paid great lip service to this issue. With the promise of more substantial federal funds, state and local governments opted to enlarge their street patrol forces, acquire military-grade weapons, and invest in crime-control technologies. As these tactical forces hit the ground, they generated a climate of surveillance and intimidation that all too often culminated in street warfare between police and residents. In what is known as the Glenville shootout in Cleveland in July 1968, a deadly street battle broke out on the city's east side between the antiriot squad and the black nationalists they had harassed for well over a year. Within an hour three white police officers, three black suspects, and one black civilian were shot to death, while fifteen others were wounded. This death toll exceeded that of the city's disturbance in 1966 and evolved into a four-day uprising. By the early 1970s, tactical squads flourished in major U.S. cities, the most violent and notorious of which included STRESS (Stop the Robberies, Enjoy Safe Streets) in Detroit



A soldier stands guard in the aftermath of the April 1968 uprising in Washington, D.C. Photograph by Warren K. Leffler. Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

between 1971 and 1973 and CRASH (Community Resources against Street Hoodlums) in Los Angeles between 1973 and 2000.<sup>21</sup>

Ultimately, the federal government dissolved War on Poverty programs, replacing them with the state apparatus of punishment—including law enforcement, criminal justice, and prison systems—that remains at the heart of American economic and social policy. Although Johnson could not have foreseen that the War on Crime would eventually completely supplant the War on Poverty, by wedding antipoverty and anticrime interventions and thereby expanding and strengthening the carceral state, his administration sowed the seeds of the liberal welfare state's undoing. For the remainder of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, the federal government continued on the path set by Johnson, eventually sustaining surveillance and confinement as the nation's primary social programs.

By the dawn of mass incarceration in the 1980s, as the scale of resources allocated to federal crime-control measures ballooned from \$22 million in 1965 to approximately \$7 billion before Ronald Reagan's presidency, contact with police, a stay in a juvenile detention center, and a long term in prison had become parts of ordinary life for a generation of black Americans. Following the union of social welfare and social control measures facilitated by the Johnson administration, the strategies federal policy makers adopted for the War on Crime yielded new possibilities for supervision in segregated urban public schools, housing projects, and within families on welfare. These targeted patrol and

<sup>21</sup> Kerner et al., *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 304. Louis H. Masotti and Jerome R. Corsi, *Shoot-Out in Cleveland: Black Militants and the Police; A Report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence* (Washington, 1969); Mae Mallory, "The Framing of Ahmed Evans," *Black Scholar*, 2 (April–May 1971), 19–23; and Leonard N. Moore, *Carl B. Stokes and the Rise of Black Political Power* (Urbana, 2002). On STRESS (Stop the Robberies, Enjoy Safe Streets) and the social movement to abolish it, see Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca, 2001), 71–102, 128–58. On CRASH (Community Resources against Street Hoodlums), see Mike Davis, *City of Quartz* (New York, 1990), 287.

surveillance programs brought black communities, and black youth in particular, into everyday contact with police. By tying federal grant funds to arrest records, the law enforcement policies birthed by the Great Society promoted the apprehension of alarming numbers of low-income urban Americans and ensnared them in the clutches of criminal-justice supervision. Once marginalized men and women from urban communities were detained, increasingly draconian sentencing guidelines vastly increased the chance that they would serve long sentences in prison. Penal confinement, in turn, often transformed low-income youth into hardened criminals (even Nixon referred to prisons as “colleges of crime”), as an ever-increasing police presence expanded the carceral web. Born from one of the most idealistic enterprises in the nation’s history, the punitive transformation of domestic urban policy that now overshadows much of the Great Society’s social promise has left as its legacy more crime, more prisons, and more inequality.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> This \$7 billion figure amounts to some \$28 billion today. Vesla Weaver, “Frontlash: Race and the Politics of Punishment” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2007), 115. Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York, 2011); Julilly Kohler-Hausmann, “‘The Attila the Hun Law’: New York’s Rockefeller Drug Laws and the Making of the Punitive State,” *Journal of Social History*, 44 (Fall 2010), 71–95; Marc Mauer, *Race to Incarcerate* (New York, 2006); Jerome G. Miller, *Search and Destroy: African-American Males in the Criminal Justice System* (New York, 1996); Heather Ann Thompson, “Why Mass Incarceration Matters: Rethinking Crisis, Decline, and Transformation in Postwar American History,” *Journal of American History*, 97 (Dec. 2010), 703–58; Michael Tonry, *Malign Neglect—Race, Crime, and Punishment in America* (New York, 1995); Bruce Western, *Punishment and Inequality in America* (New York, 2006). Richard Nixon, “Remarks to the National Conference of Corrections, Williamsburg, Virginia,” Dec. 6, 1971, *American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3245>.