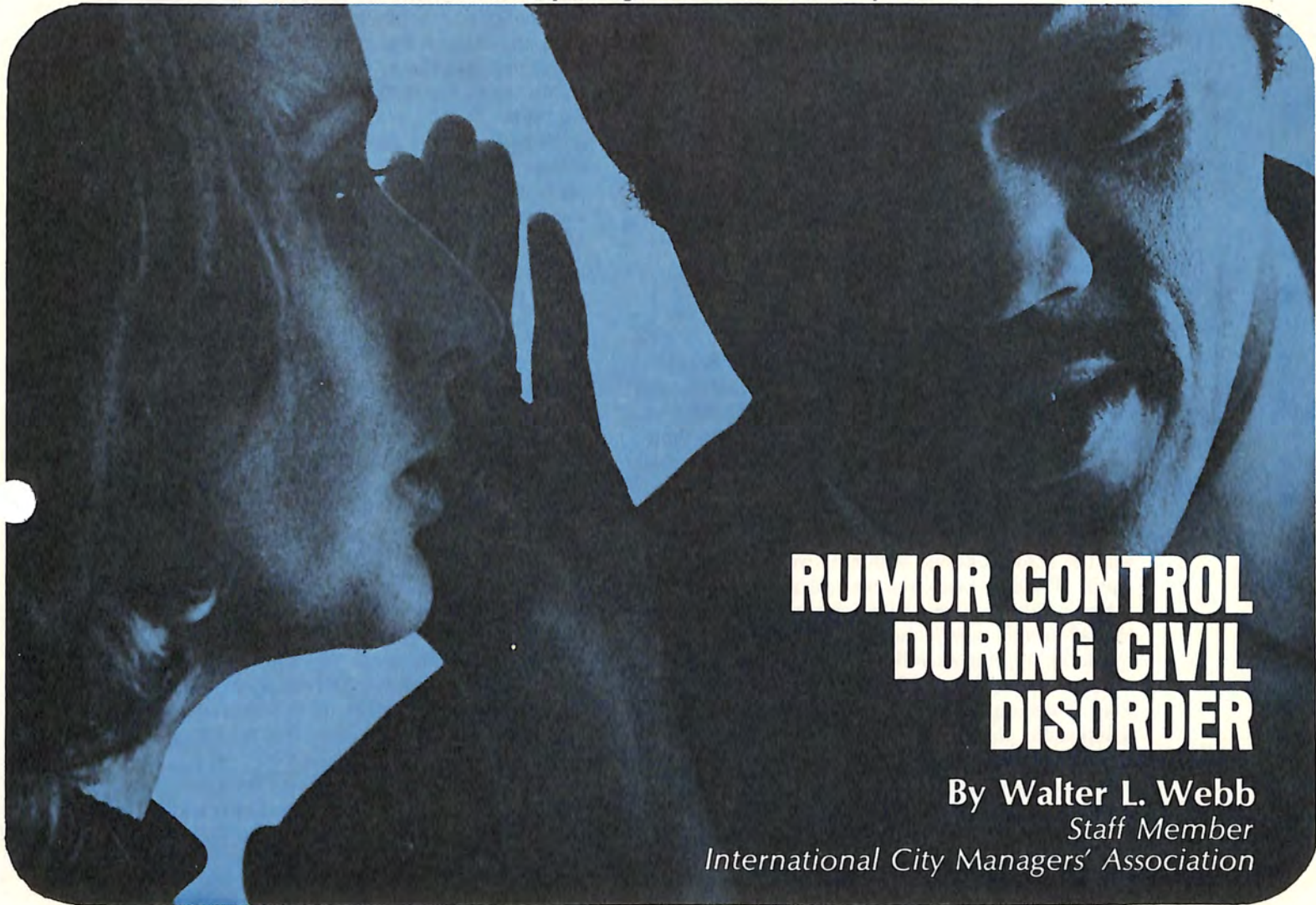


MIS

Management Information Service

International City Managers' Association / January 1969



RUMOR CONTROL DURING CIVIL DISORDER

By Walter L. Webb
Staff Member

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THE REPORT AT A GLANCE

Rumors are the sparks that ignite and fan many a riot. With modern advances in communications, the spreading of rumors during civil disorders is easier than ever before, and the high-tension atmosphere of riots makes citizens vulnerable to distortions of truth.

In an effort to squelch rumors that feed on civil disturbances, several cities have set up rumor control centers. Basically, such a center consists of a well-publi-

cized telephone service that citizens may call during times of racial tension to report incidents and to check out rumors. The Chicago Commission on Human Relations has established a "Rumor Central" that is being looked into by other cities as a model. A separate phone number for rumor control, tactful personnel who have the confidence of those who phone the center, and effective "call-back" procedures are among

the keys for effective operation.

Rumor control should be integrated with the city's total public information program for civil disorders. Good public relations in normal times is essential for avoiding a "credibility gap" in public announcements during crisis. It may be that the most effective way for city officials to fight destructive rumors is to spread contradictory "rumors" of peace, order, and quiet.

Rumor Control During Civil Disorders

By Walter L. Webb

Staff Member

International City Managers' Association

"The entire Loop is in flames!" . . . "Rap Brown is here!" . . . "Everybody is looting at Milwaukee and Ashland." . . . "Stokely Carmichael has just landed by submarine from Lake Michigan." . . . "Twenty thousand Negroes are marching on the Loop, the streets are deserted, and all the shoppers are locked inside the department stores!"

These are just a few of the rumors that spread like wildfire across Chicago within a five-day period last April. If these savage rumors had gone unchecked, "they could have done the city far more damage than Mrs. O'Leary's cow," one observer has commented.

Inevitably, rumors will multiply during periods of tension and anxiety. Civil unrest, for a variety of reasons, is shaking our social order. In such a situation, innumerable phantoms roam and haunt the city.

That is why the shattering power of rumors is being closely examined, perhaps for the first time in history. Computers on the campus of Brandeis University are beginning to check all kinds of information about rumors — the time of day they pop up, the typical circumstances, etc. — in an effort to pin down their birth, life, and death.

And public servants in several major cities — perhaps most notably Chicago — have developed techniques for quashing rumors as soon as they pose a threat to community stability. This report, based largely on the Chicago experience, is intended to aid local officials in their efforts to fight rumors, particularly in times of riot and civil disorder.

The Psychology of Rumor

There are two requirements for a rumor to grow:

(1) It must contain information that is important, in

one way or another, to the hearer. (2) The details must be cloudy. Yet, beyond these basic "rumor-facts," it is surprising that so little is known about rumors, for they have profoundly affected man's history.

Armies have clashed and governments have toppled on the basis of unfounded rumors. Nero, for example, did not really fiddle while Rome burned; it was a rumor deliberately spread by his enemies. The United States certainly had no plans, in 1958, to restore the dictator Perez Jimenez to power in Venezuela, yet that rumor touched off the deadly "anti-Nixon" riots that disturbed hemispheric relationships for years.

Because rumors have always spread like a dread disease through man's organizations, one expert suspects that they fill some deep-felt need in human society, despite the fact that they can rip the fabric of that society in short order.¹

WHY RUMORS GROW

The one new factor in the field of rumors is their speed of transmission. Nowadays, of course, rumors spread more quickly than in the past, thanks to the telephone. But essentially they are the same as always — falsehoods masquerading as truths.

"We live in a world of instant communications," says Dr. Dana L. Farnsworth, who for many years has observed the effects of mass tension on mental health. "Yet this simply means that unfounded rumors can spread as rapidly as the truth."

Dr. Farnsworth, who is chairman of the Council on Mental Health of the American Medical Association, points out that rumors inevitably breed *more* rumors in a deadly spiral. "Rumors blur the edges of truth, thus making people feel still more insecure. And because insecurity is the soil in which rumors grow, any rumor simply increases the likelihood of the emergence of still more rumors."

Why do citizens play with fire by passing on rumors? One authority has suggested that rumors may be to society what daydreams are to individuals. As such, they could be wish fulfillment or fear fulfillment. Psychologists have long demonstrated that humans often see what they *expect* to see, what they *wish* to see, or what they *fear* to see.

¹ An effective technique for illustrating how rumors grow is to simulate a rumor. The process is quite simple. An observer of a given situation reports to a non-observer what he witnessed. The non-observer then passes on to another non-observer what he was told, this non-observer in turn reports to another non-observer, etc. The "story" as it ends up is often humorously different from what the actual witness originally reported.

The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith has prepared a rumor clinic based on the above "laboratory-rumor" principle. The clinic features a film strip to illustrate the situations to be reported and passed on. Information about the clinic may be obtained from regional offices of the League.

"Uncertainty increases the vulnerability of the individual," states Dr. Farnsworth. "During a period of tension, the individual becomes highly suspicious. The more lurid the story, the more likely it is to be believed. Because of their very uncertainty, rumors are more likely to be believed than fact."

Apparently, too, there is an inner compulsion that forces many citizens to pass on a rumor. "When a person hears a rumor," continues Dr. Farnsworth, "he then has (or at least feels he has) unique information. This makes him an important person in his own eyes. He feels good toward himself, even though the rumor may be terrifying. But he can only continue this feeling of goodness, of importance, if he imparts his unique information to someone else."

RUMORS DURING RIOTS

No riot occurs without rumors to incite, accompany, and intensify the violence, noted the late Gordon Allport of Harvard, considered the foremost authority on the nature of rumor.

The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (the Kerner Commission) found irrefutable evidence that rumors not only caused the rapid spread of last summer's disorders, *but in some cases actually touched off those disorders*. Here is what its report says:

"Rumors significantly aggravated tension and disorder in more than 65 percent of the disorders studied by the Commission. Sometimes, as in Tampa and New Haven, rumor served as the spark which turned an incident into a civil disorder. Elsewhere, notably Detroit and Newark, even when they were not precipitating or motivating factors, inflaming rumors made the job of police and community leaders far more difficult."

The Tampa incident was a clear-cut case of a rumor causing society to devour itself. In the earliest stages of unrest, a deputy sheriff died. The wire services immediately sent out a news flash that rioters had killed the man. The rumor spread. Within 30 minutes reporters discovered the truth — that the deputy had died of a heart attack. By then it was too late; the city was in turmoil.

Another rumor, the following day, compounded the problem. Tampa police headquarters was informed by semihysterical rumor-listeners that 20 Negro men, bared to the waist and carrying clubs, had assembled. Actually, the men turned out to be construction workers simply doing their job. Yet the rumor had already done its damage. It took the National Guard and intense efforts on the part of community leaders, both Negro and white, to restore order.

Patricia Q. Sheehan, the mayor of New Brunswick, New Jersey, confirms the deadly power of rumors. During the disorders last year, she observed, it seemed "almost as if there was a fever in the air." The press, radio, and TV reported that guerrilla bands were

roaming the streets — an unfounded rumor that struck terror into white communities.

"Rumors were coming in from all sides on July 17th," she reported to the Kerner Commission. "Negroes were calling to warn of possible disturbances; whites were calling; shop owners were calling. Most of the people were concerned about a possible bloodbath." The thought crossed her mind at that time that "we are talking ourselves into it."

On the campus of Brandeis University, in Waltham, Massachusetts, the new Lemberg Center for the Study of Violence hopes eventually to feed computers with all sorts of information about riots — rumors, times of day, temperature, triggering incidents, etc. — and find relationships that may help in predicting violence.

Center officials note that rumors are obviously not the sole cause of riots. Their causes are many and deepseated. But once riots have begun, rumors can make them worse.

The Center's preliminary findings, according to Miss Terry Knopf, research associate, indicate there is a pattern to them. First, there are general and vague predictions of impending trouble. "Whites," "Negroes," "Army," or "police" are said to be arming and preparing. These reports keep tension high. Next come specific rumors that prepare and trigger action.

Rumor Control Operations

Perhaps the nation's best-run rumor control operation last summer was set up by the Chicago Commission on Human Relations. With its dedicated band of rumor-quashers — professional social workers, clerks, typists, volunteers — the Commission operated with such success that its techniques are being copied by a good many cities around the country. The Commission's "Rumor Central" — as the operation was named — was singled out for commendation by the Kerner Commission.²

As reported by Raymond J. Siewert, supervisor of Rumor Central, the best method for quashing rumors is simple: "The bald truth, good or bad, is the only way to fight a rumor." Yet the bald truth must be instantly available to the public — and it is here that

² MIS has received information on rumor control centers in more than 25 cities. Since the Chicago Rumor Central incorporates principles widely used elsewhere, this report focuses primarily on the Chicago experience.

Other cities which MIS has learned have either set up, or intend to set up, rumor control centers are:

Phoenix, Ariz.; Hartford, Conn.; Atlanta, Ga.; Decatur, Ill.; Wichita, Kan.; Louisville, Ky.; Baltimore and Salisbury, Md.; Boston and Springfield, Mass.; Detroit, Flint, and Grand Rapids, Mich.; Kansas City, Mo.; Plainfield, N.J.; Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse, N.Y.; Dayton, Toledo, and Youngstown, Ohio; Oklahoma City, Okla.; Erie and Philadelphia, Pa.; Houston, Tex.; Norfolk and Richmond, Va.; and Seattle, Wash.

Rumor Central's techniques are being looked to as a guide.

The Commission has published a full description of how Rumor Central operates. Since the description is reproduced in full as an appendix to this report, the following section presents only an overview of the operation, noting particularly the key factors to its success.

"RUMOR CENTRAL" IN ACTION

Chicago's Rumor Central — which on a limited scale operates throughout the year — consists in times of crisis of a telephone hookup manned 24 hours a day, field workers who gather factual information with which to combat rumors, and others who try to spread the truth in danger areas. The Central phone number is widely advertised in the press and on TV, and citizens are urged to call and check the truth of any reports they have heard.

The system met its first big test in the wake of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Rumor Central was besieged with calls. Two telephone lines quickly proved inadequate, and three others were added. Thousands of calls continued to swamp the lines, while delays ran to a matter of hours. Ten lines finally were opened and volunteers brought in from seminaries throughout the city. For the three days of the riot, 15 people answered the calls, 24 hours a day. If the facts were not known, the caller's number was taken, the situation investigated, and the citizen was called back promptly.

"It's really a simple technique," reports James E. Burns, director of the Human Relations Commission. "We answer questions, calm people, deny rumors, allay fears, and try to protect people by keeping them out of the danger zones. We have to have the trust of the public, and we must have accurate information on what's going on."

During the height of the April disturbances, Rumor Central in the Commission offices resembled a military situation room. At least five telephone lines were reserved for residents' queries. Other lines were kept open for periodic reports from Commission field workers who were circulating in troubled areas.

A wall-sized map of the Chicago area, with a plastic overlay, was used to pinpoint trouble spots. Areas where sniping occurred were marked with a blue grease pencil, blocked-off streets were marked in black, burning sections in red, alternate bus lines around tense sections in yellow, and so on.

One-third of the 27 professionals on the Commission staff are Negroes, many of whom were spending long hours in the riot areas talking to neighborhood leaders and trying to calm the situation.

To make certain that the information is correct, Rumor Central has its own network of intelligence courses. When any kind of civil unrest breaks loose in Chicago, trained Commission staffers immediately

MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SERVICE

January 1969 — Vol. 1 No. L-1

Editor: Walter L. Webb

Management Information Service reports are published monthly by the International City Managers' Association, 1140 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036. Second-class postage permit pending. Copyright © 1969 by the International City Managers' Association.

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race to the scene of the disturbance and promptly phone in on-the-spot reports. One man is dispatched to police headquarters to monitor all calls, another to the fire department. Still other staff members perform liaison work with the mayors' office, city agencies, and private organizations dealing with civil rights.

One good intelligence tool, Commission staffers report, is simply a city phone directory cross-referenced by location. When a call comes in asking about trouble in a certain block and nothing is known about the situation, a Rumor Central staffer will call citizens at random in that block, identify himself, and calmly ask if there are any signs of a disturbance.

New facts, as they come in, are immediately typed, copied by machine, and distributed within two or three minutes to all phone operators so they will have the latest situation reports at their fingertips.

The Chicago experience points up several easily overlooked factors that many cities have found important in establishing a rumor central. Among them:

- *A separate phone number for rumor control is desirable.* This not only frees the police department from overly used phone lines but — perhaps more important — creates a "climate of trust" between the rumor-inquirer and the rumor control center. During civil disorders, citizens — particularly non-white — often suspect that information given over police department phones is purposely distorted to make the city government look good.

• *Rumor central must be trusted by citizens to tell the truth.* It is desirable, if possible, for non-whites to handle the rumor inquiries of other non-whites. Some cities report a greater climate of trust by having a non-governmental agency (such as the Urban League) man the rumor control center.

• *The center should operate round-the-clock.* Imagine the hysteria that could be caused by a rumor that even the rumor control center had been knocked out! (i.e., "I phoned, but they didn't answer.")

• *The "call-back" technique should be used.* Not only is it important for the center to phone a caller when new information is available about his request. It is also helpful to ask callers to phone the center back when they have new information on a rumor they heard.

RESPONDING TO RUMOR CALLS

The ultimate success of a rumor control center depends on how rumor calls are handled. No amount of accurate information will dispel fears if the contact between rumor central and the inquirer is unsatisfactory.

Officials of the Chicago Rumor Central note that their personnel manned phones only two hours at a stretch, because "it is an exhausting experience to deal by telephone with hysterical or frightened persons."

Recognizing the need for skilled response to rumor calls, the director of the rumor control center in Detroit, Michigan, issued special rumor-response instructions to his staff. The instructions distinguish the types of calls received and suggest general responses. The following briefly summarizes these guidelines:

Rumor-Response Guidelines (Detroit)

Crank Calls. These are defined as calls in which the caller is either abusive or wishes to offer suggestions for solving city problems. The staff should courteously hang up if a caller is abusive, obscene, or insulting. If callers want to offer suggestions, the staff should be courteous, refrain from debate, and terminate the conversation as soon as possible.

Gossip. This would include information dealing with a person's personal life (e.g., "Is _____ going with _____?") In response to such inquiries, the staff should state the function of the rumor control center (e.g., an attempt to clarify distorted information, particularly concerning racial incidents, and to prevent the spread of rumors) and point out that personal information is not a part of this function.

Requests for Irrelevant Information. Persons often call with rumors or questions not related to racial incidents. When possible, give a courteous answer to the question and state the function of the rumor control center, emphasizing that this type of request is

not included in the center's function.

Rumors or Questions About Individuals, Organizations, or Agencies. Some callers will ask specific questions about other agencies or organizations (e.g., Will the police strike?) These persons should be referred to the agency or group in question.

Speculative Rumors. Persons sometimes call with vague rumors or questions about future racial incidents which cannot be investigated. Some of these callers may be fearful, some concerned, and some hostile. In any case, get as much information as the caller is willing to give and respond in a way similar to the following:

"There are no facts to substantiate this statement as anything but a rumor. Riots are not inevitable, and no one is able to predict what will happen in the future. The city is prepared to handle any situation that occurs, and we believe that the public good cannot be served by repeating rumors such as these."

Copies of the mayor's television speech are available for use in responding to these inquiries.

If the caller does not accept this statement of the city's position, no further questioning, discussion, or explanation should be offered. The call should be terminated with the statement that the center has made a written report on the information and it will be turned over to field investigators. Ask that if the caller gets any additional information, he turn it over to rumor control for investigation.

A person may call with information about a future event with specific facts that can be investigated.

In such cases, the staff should get as much information as possible, including a copy of any literature being passed out if available, and explain that it will be given to the field staff for further investigation. If this information has already been obtained, relate the facts to the caller, clarifying any distortions. These calls should be catalogued in a central information file (e.g., three x five-inch cards identifying the incident in detail, along with a report of subsequent investigation) available to every staff member for use in verifying rumors. If the caller wishes to leave his name and phone number, the staff should offer to call back with information uncovered.

Rumors on Past and Present Issues and Events. A caller might ask a question or give information about an incident which has already happened or is happening at the time of the call.

In these cases, obtain information and follow the same response procedure as with future-event rumors noted above. Particularly, combat distortions with the facts available and, where necessary, state that the incident is still under investigation, the appropriate authorities have been notified and are acting in response to the distortions, and this is all the information we have at this time.

In general, the staff should be particularly aware of the need to probe each call and 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.

Public Information During Disorders

Rumor control is but a facet of the broader problem of managing public information during disorders. At a special meeting in mid-1968, sponsored by the National League of Cities, public information specialists compared notes on how they handled the information needs of the public and press during last summer's civil disturbances. Major points made at the meeting are summarized here as a guide for planning rumor control operations within the context of a *total* public information program for civil disorders.³

• **Single information source:** Many cities believe it important to have a single central headquarters for presenting information to the press and public. Most of these "press centrals" are located either in city hall (one city uses the council chamber) or in police headquarters. But several cities favor two information centers — one in the field for riot control information and another in city hall for major policy statements by the mayor and other officials. The two-center approach is definitely advised for best control of rumors.

• **Adequate staffing and equipment:** City information specialists or trained police officers of high rank should man the press centers. Enough telephone lines and facilities for radio and television coverage also must be planned for.

• **Intergovernmental coordination:** Plans must be made early to assure early coordinated release of information by local, state, and federal officials, preferably from one central point.

• **Background and comparative data:** Several cities have found it useful, particularly in dealing with out-of-town newsmen, to have background handouts prepared on what the city has already done to alleviate some of the stated causes of riots. Comparative data regarding the number of arrests, crimes committed, and fire calls during "normal" periods also are helpful in giving perspective to incidents occurring during riots.

• **Advance conferences with news media:** Most

³ Copies of *Public Information and Civil Disorders*, containing a meeting summary and texts of typical city emergency public information plans, may be obtained for \$2.00 each from the National League of Cities, Department of Urban Studies, 1612 K Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006.

cities recommend holding conferences with news media representatives to get — if possible — agreement on how riots would be reported, particularly the handling of rumors. Some cities use a 30-minute voluntary system of withholding reports that a disturbance has occurred in the hopes that it can be controlled in that time. Many reported success with getting news media cooperation in first checking their information with press central officials before broadcasting or printing it. Most of the public relations officials agreed that trying to get a total press-radio-TV embargo on disturbance news was impractical.

• **Press identification:** Some cities have special color-coded badges and identification cards for newsmen which are issued at press headquarters. Outer-garment and vehicle emblems often are requested by newsmen to prevent their being picked up by police after curfew hours have begun.

Planning is perhaps the biggest need in meeting the public information requirements during a civil disorder, the meeting concluded. In addition, many of the specialists stressed the need for city officials to recognize the public relations aspects of their operations in normal times if crisis announcements were to avoid a "credibility gap."

Each of these recommendations can complement a rumor control center and alleviate its problems.

Rumor Versus Rumor

During the height of last summer's riots, one caller had a curious request for Chicago's Rumor Central: "What are the latest rumors?"

Actually, it was not a completely foolish question, for *rumors can be used effectively to counter riots*. Rumors of peace, order, quiet, and racial cooperation might prove more than helpful. After the death of Martin Luther King, for example, Mayor John Lindsay of New York spread the rumor that New York City was quiet. By covering up actual violence on Friday night, many observers feel that the mayor probably stopped outbreaks of arson and looting on Saturday, Sunday, and Monday.

Indeed, fighting rumor with rumor may well be the most effective technique available to city officials for heading off civil disorders. The calm, restrained voice of top city officials over TV and radio as rumors of riots are forming is essential to maintaining citizen calm.

Yet in the final analysis, it is the individual citizen who determines the life, growth, and death of a rumor. He can pass it on, he can embellish it — or he can question its validity.

"In a potential panic situation," advises Dr. Farnsworth, "remain cool and collected." It is a difficult prescription to fulfill, but city officials must take all possible steps to fight the deadly consequences of citywide panic.

Appendix

Recommended Procedure for Setting Up a Rumor Control Central*

Basically, Rumor Central consists of ten telephones connected on a sequential hunt system, personnel to man the telephones, a good system of communication with the police and fire departments and various other private and public agencies with staff in the field, and two men to check out rumors and to receive incoming reports from these departments. The operation can be expanded or decreased in size as the volume of calls merits.

There are five basic considerations in setting up a Rumor Central. These are:

1. Publicizing the telephone number
2. Physical equipment
3. Personnel
4. Clearly defined procedures
5. Adequate system of communication with the police and fire departments and other sources of intelligence

Publicity

Once the decision had been made to establish Rumor Central, the City News Bureau, a central news-gathering agency, was notified. Information about the service went out on its lines to all member media. The press was given the Rumor Central number and was told that it was a number where citizens could report incidents, check out rumors, and obtain other information relevant to civil disorder. We received excellent cooperation from the news media. In addition to using the information as a public service announcement, many included it as a news item.

* This appendix is excerpted from *Rumor Central*, issued by the Chicago Commission on Human Relations. The recommended procedure is that used by the Commission's own Rumor Central.

Physical Operation

The operation should be centralized and include:

Telephones. One phone number and from two to ten phones connected on a sequential hunt, so that if the first is busy, the call is relayed to the next line. Preferably, the connected phones should not be lines used by the agency in the course of normal business. Two separate phones to be used exclusively by research staff responsible for receiving police reports and checking rumors.

Large Map. Street map of the city, visible to all phones, covered by clear plastic, on which verified incidents can be recorded.

Blackboard. Also clearly visible to phones, on which verified quiet areas and the nature and progress of incidents may be recorded.

Telephone Notebooks. Notebooks to be placed at each phone for telephone personnel to use as resource material in answering questions. Each should include a street map of the city to be used in routing callers around disorders and xeroxed copies of reports and newspaper clippings giving details about curfew regulations, agencies distributing food, and other pertinent information.

Contact Notebooks. One for each staff research man which includes all important phone numbers to be used in checking out information.

Forms. (1) Log for personnel to tally incoming calls and record the content of important ones. (2) Incident report forms for recording all verified police and fire department information, these to be compiled in a

permanent log. (3) Rumor check-out forms for telephone personnel to give contact research staff requesting that he check out a rumor.

Personnel

During the peak of disorders, Rumor Central was manned 24 hours a day. Personnel were assigned to day shifts, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., or night shifts beginning at 6:00 p.m.

In the evening, staff remained on duty until the number of incoming calls began to dwindle. Then the Commission answering service took over, usually around 2:00 a.m., relaying to a staff person at home only the most important calls. The following personnel are recommended:

Supervisor.

Telephone Personnel. One per phone, plus several extra to relieve them. To supplement staff, we enlisted the help of volunteers, primarily graduate students.

A volunteer should have a good knowledge of the physical geography of a city and the location of major streets, an understanding of the problems that can occur during a disorder, and an authoritative, reassuring telephone manner.

All telephone personnel, staff and volunteers, received an initial briefing on the correct way to answer the phones and subsequent briefings before each shift to fill them in on answers to current questions and details of on-going disturbances.

Research Contact Men. Several staff members clearly identified as such to the telephone personnel and permanently available

to take incoming police and fire reports and check out rumors.

Clerk. To record all disturbances and verify quiet areas on the blackboard, keep the map up to date, reproduce and circulate information, and keep a permanent log of police and fire reports.

Field Staff. As available and necessary, to go to the scene of reported trouble and feed back information. During the height of the trouble, we stationed a man in the police department where he could listen to all incoming reports and relay up-to-the-minute information to us. In the future, we plan to have our own radio receiving equipment so that all incoming police reports will be received directly by our office.

Typical Calls and Procedure for Handling

Incident Calls. Many people call to report an incident or find out if a rumor they have heard is true. For example, "I can see smoke and hear sirens from my apartment at _____. Can you tell me what is happening?"

If a fire in that vicinity is recorded on the blackboard, the person answering the phone simply gives the caller the facts. "Yes, there was a fire at _____. It is under control and the police have dispersed the people who gathered."

If there is no report on the board, the

operator records the location and nature of the rumor and relays it to the contact man to check out. The caller may wait for confirmation, but most are satisfied with an answer like, "Thank your for reporting it; we are now checking it out." Once the information has been checked out, the facts are given to all telephone personnel.

Information Calls. These include a wide range of questions concerning curfew, location of the National Guard, and agencies distributing food and clothing. Many of these questions can be anticipated and the answers explained prior to any shift and included in the phone notebooks.

One frequent kind of information call is on travel within the city. "I have to work tonight and usually travel south on Western Avenue. Is that route safe?" The operator will refer to the big map and his street map, then either answer, "We have no report of trouble in that area. You shouldn't have any problems," or "There have been fires on that street and traffic is being rerouted. You might detour and take Damen."

Good Communications System

A Rumor Central operation is valuable only to the extent that the information disseminated is correct. Consequently, good outside contacts and efficient means of relaying information to telephone personnel are essential.

The potential outside contacts should be identified prior to the establishment of a Rumor Central and their phone numbers recorded so that any staff member can check out rumors. These sources may include the police and fire departments, city youth agencies, social centers, and other institutions that might be in the area of trouble or have access to dependable information. Contact must be made with these agencies in advance, letting them know they will be contacted and requesting that they report to Rumor Central if they have information. The research men should also establish a schedule for making routine checks with the police department to obtain relevant reports. Contact was made with the police department at least every 20 minutes.

If field staff are available, they can be dispatched to trouble areas to report regularly.

Good communications within the operation depend upon the clear definition of responsibility and communication procedures. The research contact men are perhaps the most vital part of the operation. All telephone personnel should know who is on duty to check out rumors and should submit written requests for information to these research men. After any report is checked out with the police department, the information should be recorded on the blackboard for all personnel so that duplication of checking is avoided.