

COURT TV

PROS & CONS

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NANCY GRACE: It's an image that can never be erased. President and Mrs. Kennedy waiving to the crowds and then suddenly shots ring out and a hero died. And then graphic images of people beaten and arrested as they protested the Vietnam War. Well, following those events President Lyndon Johnson created the National Violence Commission. Now, thirty years later, are we more violent than ever before? An update from the Violence Commission is to be released tomorrow, and it may reveal some surprising answers. With us live, Court TV's very own chief anchor Fred Graham. Fred, this is incredibly impressive to me, you were a reporter with the New York Times when President Johnson started the Commission, and you actually contributed to the original report. Can you tell me -- are we up or we down on violence thirty years later?

FRED GRAHAM: There certainly is a perception that we are down. Violence has gone down steadily this decade of the 1990s. We don't have uprisings on our college campuses. Assassinations of our leaders have stopped, at least for now. Lyndon Johnson appointed this Commission and I was a part of it. I was not a member, but I contributed to it. Crime zig zagged around and then, in the 80s, it rocketed up. Well, now it's coming down and that creates the perception that overall it's down. In fact, it's gone down to where it was when Lyndon Johnson appointed this Commission. So we still have a very violent country.

NANCY GRACE: Are we no better or no worse than we were thirty years ago? We basically have learned nothing -- that's the way that I see it. Law enforcement hasn't really reduced violence.

FRED GRAHAM: Well, actually we made have learned some things. The experts said that crime and violence would continue to go up in the 90s -- because many young people were moving up into those very crime-prone ages, you know the late teenage years. But crime went down. So the only way you can figure out what might have happened is what changed. Good economy. Maybe when people have jobs they don't steal.

NANCY GRACE: And of course in the 80s, the use of cocaine and crack cocaine was on the rise.

FRED GRAHAM: But now its gone down.

NANCY GRACE: The thing I would love to ask the Commission is why? Fred, you know for over a decade I prosecuted felony violent crime, street crime. I finally got to a point where I was beating myself in the head asking why, why? Finally, I would just tell juries, Fred, don't even ask why. I can't tell you why this happened. So do you have any reason as to why?

FRED GRAHAM: There are three things that back thirty years ago they said were problems. Some of the others have gone away. But three are still with us. First, on handguns, we have failed miserably. There were ninety million handguns back thirty years ago. Everyone said that it was a crisis - - 200 million today is much worse. Second, there is a serious problem in the high rate of crime among African-Americans. Nobody knows why. But it's many times as high as for most other groups. That's a problem that hasn't changed. The report back then talked about it and this last report talks about it. Finally, violence in the media They thought it was a problem then, and they think it's still a problem now.

NANCY GRACE: So you see a gun connection, a media connection and I believe in a drug connection. Of course, the use of crack is down. Fred, incredibly, impressive work and still looking for answers I guess.

Thank you for being with me tonight -- what a treat.