

# WHAT TOGETHER WE CAN DO



A Forty Year Update of the National Advisory  
Commission on Civil Disorders

Preliminary Findings  
THE EISENHOWER FOUNDATION

# What Together We Can Do

A Forty Year Update of the  
National Advisory Commission on  
Civil Disorders

Executive Summary  
Preliminary Findings and Recommendations

The Eisenhower Foundation  
Washington, DC

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## **Introduction**

The bipartisan National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders issued its final report to the nation on March 1, 1968. Convened by President Lyndon B. Johnson after the urban disorders and rebellions of the mid-1960s, the panel was known as the Kerner Commission, after then-Illinois Governor Otto Kerner.

The Eisenhower Foundation is the private sector continuation of the Kerner Commission and the bipartisan National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, formed by President Johnson after the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King and Senator Robert F. Kennedy in 1968.

The Foundation periodically updates the Kerner Commission and the Violence Commission. This 40 year Kerner update is titled *What Together We Can Do*, based on a phrase from President John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address. To begin constructing the report, we held hearings in Detroit, Newark and Washington DC. The hearings secured recommendations from citizens, community leaders and organizers, the media, religious leaders, public sector officials and private sector leaders. See [eisenhowerfoundation.org](http://eisenhowerfoundation.org) for hearing transcripts and video testimony. These recommendations are being incorporated into the update.

The Foundation also formed a Fortieth Anniversary Kerner Commission National Advisory Panel. Members include Algernon Austin, Jared Bernstein, Jeff Blodgett, David Callahan, Henry Cisneros, Rick Cohen, Elliott Currie, Alan Curtis, Linda Darling-Hammond, Peter Dreier, Greg Duncan, Peter Edelman, Pablo Eisenberg, Jeff Faux, Joan Fitzgerald, Robert Michael Franklin, Alton Frye, Felix Gutierrez, Fred R. Harris, William D. Hartung, Gary Hart, John R. Irons, Alan Jenkins, Ezra Klein, Jeff Krehely, James Lardner, Steven LaFrance, Richard M. Lerner, Robert W. McChesney, Leila McDowell, Gary Orfield, Diana M. Pearce, Charlene Sinclair, Gregory D. Squires, Marta Tienda, Joseph Torres and S. Derek Turner. In the update, we have drawn on the papers submitted by these Panelists to the Foundation.

The update was first released in February, 2008. Attachment 1 contains initial media coverage – for example, in the *Washington Post*, *Newsweek*, *USA Today*, the *Guardian*, regional newspapers and *Bill Moyers Journal*. The present summary was revised after the 2008 election.

The Eisenhower Foundation is continuing to dialogue and hold forums with the American people on the preliminary findings and recommendations summarized here. We seek to vet our preliminary report – so that the feedback and critique will yield a more comprehensive and diverse final product. A full length and referenced final report will be published in 2009.

In the summary that follows, we present a top ten list of findings and a top ten list of policy recommendations.

## **Top Ten Findings**

1. **The Kerner Commission's Goals and Conclusions.** The 1968 Kerner Commission's goals were to reduce poverty, reduce inequality, reduce racial injustice, reduce crime, reduce fear, and create a more responsible media that was less controlled by corporate interests. Concluding that the nation was moving toward two societies, one Black, one White, separate and unequal, the Commission said that it was "time to make good the promises of American democracy to all citizens – urban and rural, White and Black, Spanish surname, American Indian and every minority group."
2. **Progress Since the Kerner Commission.** The election in 2008 of the nation's first African American President symbolizes the reversal of the movement toward a racially separate and unequal America. The expansion of the African American and Hispanic middle class and the rapid growth of locally elected minority officials since the Kerner Commission further underlie the reversal.

The victory of 2008 was achieved through a coalition of many groups – including African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans and Asian Americans. The coalition was, in effect, a response to the Kerner Commission's call for greater diversity in the democratic process.

We do not yet know whether the dramatic 2008 election breakthrough will be short term or will frame a long term trend. What is clear, however, is that the hope represented by the 2008 election contrasts with the failure of America to meet many of the other goals of the Kerner Commission, as documented below.

3. **Poverty.** Thirty-seven million Americans live in poverty today in the richest country in history. 46 million Americans are without health insurance, and over 30 percent of the poor are unprotected. The child poverty rate increased from 1968 to 2007. For children aged 5 and younger, the poverty rate in America is about 21 percent today. The American child poverty rate is about 4 times the average child poverty rate for Western European countries. The African American poverty rate has increased since 2000.
4. **Inequality.** Since the late 1970s, income inequality has been growing in America. The rich have been getting richer and the poor have been getting poorer. America has one of the highest levels of income inequality in the industrialized world and the highest level of wealth inequality. Over the last 40 years, America has had the most rapid growth in wage inequality in the industrialized world. Since the Kerner Commission, productivity has increased significantly in America, but corporations have increased wages little, in real terms. At the time of the Kerner Commission, CEOs of large American companies earned about 40 times as much as average workers. Today, CEOs of large American companies earn about 275 times as much.

Deregulation has been an economic and ideological failure. Especially beginning in the 1980s, with Executive Branch rhetoric that “government is the problem,” federal deregulation of controls over a wide range of financial institutions and instruments increased inequality and led to the financial system crisis of 2008. Those who said government was the problem now are proposing government as the solution. Main Street taxpayers are being asked to finance the cost of Wall Street greed and federal deregulation.

5. **Jobs and Economic Performance.** Over the last 40 years, inclusive demand side economic policy that creates tight labor markets has been proven to perform better for the poor *and* for working class and middle class families than exclusionary, trickle down supply side economics that favor the rich, provide welfare to deregulated corporations and tell average Americans they’re on their own.

Nonetheless, in part through effective public relations spin and corporate lobbying, failed supply side economics dominated policy during much of the time since Kerner Commission, up until the financial crisis of 2008.

The Kerner Commission concluded that unemployment and underemployment were the most important causes of poverty, yet African American unemployment has continued to be twice as high as White unemployment during each of the 4 decades since 1968. The employment prospects of the nation’s out-of-school 16-24 year old men have declined considerably since 2000. The economic condition of African Americans is much worse today than in 2000. Home ownership rates, family incomes, wages and employment are declining. The number of African American ex-offenders struggling to find employment is constantly rising. Among high school drop outs aged 19, only 38 percent of African Americans are employed, compared to 67 percent of Whites. As overall American unemployment moved up to 6.5 percent in Fall 2008 (with 10.1 million Americans unemployed).

6. **Education.** The No Child Left Behind Act has failed. Evaluations have shown that No Child Left Behind has had little significant success in either changing previously existing educational trends or in diminishing the educational achievement gap.

The American educational system allocates more unequal inputs and produces more unequal outcomes than most other industrialized nations. Large disparities remain in America between the educational achievement of White and Asian American high school students compared to Latino and African American high school students.

American educational disparities remain linked to funding disparities. The wealthiest 10 percent of school districts in the U.S. spend nearly 10 times more than the poorest 10 percent of school districts. The highest performing students from low income American families now enroll in college at the same rate as the lowest performing students from high income American families. In other words, the smartest poor kids attend college at the same rate as the dumbest rich kids.

7. **Racial Injustice and Perception.** School desegregation proceeded rapidly in America from the 1960s to the 1980s. Then school desegregation was dramatically reversed by the courts.

Over recent decades, residential segregation has decreased for African Americans and increased for Hispanics. Overall levels of residential segregation remain high for African Americans and Latinos.

There is continuing evidence from distinguished scholars that some employers steer minority applicants into the worst jobs regardless of their qualifications; that many real estate agents steer minorities to less desirable locations, compared to Whites; and that lenders treat minorities differently from Whites in terms of percentage of mortgage applications accepted.

The likelihood for the death sentence is greater for minorities than Whites. Minorities on average receive longer sentences than Whites for the same crimes. Sentences for crack cocaine, used disproportionately by minorities, have been much longer than sentences for powder cocaine, used disproportionately by Whites.

African Americans and Whites have dramatically different perceptions on race. For example, in a national 2008 *New York Times*/CBS pre-election poll, nearly 60 percent of African Americans said race relations in America were generally bad, compared with 34 percent for Whites. Forty percent of African Americans said there had been no progress in recent years in eliminating racial discrimination, compared to about 20 percent for Whites.

8. **Fear, Crime and the Prison-Industrial Complex.** The percent of Americans reporting fear of walking alone at night has increased from about 31 percent in 1967 to about 37 percent in 2007.

The most accurately reported crime is murder. The American murder rate in the 1960s was roughly the same as it has been in the new millennium. This is so in spite of an eight fold increase in the total population of persons in prisons and jails since the late 1960s. Well over 2,000,000 persons now are in American prisons and jails. America has the highest reported rate of incarceration in the world.

African American men who have not completed high school have a 60 percent chance of imprisonment. African American men aged 25 to 29 are almost 7 times as likely to be incarcerated as their White counterparts. The rate of incarceration of African American men in the U.S. is 4 times higher than the rate of incarceration of African American men in South Africa during the pre-Nelson Mandela apartheid government.

An American prison-industrial complex has developed. The states collectively now spend more on prison construction than on construction for higher education. A disproportionate number of ex-offenders return from prison to a small number of heavily impacted communities. The national recidivism rate for persons released from prison is over 67 percent.

9. **Media.** Since the Kerner Commission, media ownership has been reduced to just a few giant, White-controlled corporations, facilitated by the federal deregulation that has failed average citizens so spectacularly. Corporate oligopolies like Comcast now are threatening control of Internet content. Billionaire media owners have a deep stake in political outcomes. Minorities are greatly underrepresented in the media. Minority ownership is miniscule. Top heavy with White middle-class men, many television news departments and many major newspapers today are focused less on quality reporting and more on declining viewership, readership and profits. The priorities of the Kerner Commission are not sufficiently covered, and then only for a short while, as media coverage of Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans and the Jena 6 have illustrated. During the 2008 presidential campaign, the nation's most popular radio host, Rush Limbaugh, used the phrase "little Black man-child" to describe the Democratic candidate.
10. **New Will.** The Kerner Commission concluded that its goals only could be achieved through the generation of "new will" in America.

The 2008 election may signal the beginning of such new will. However, until very recently, the long term, 40 year, trend was counter to the priorities of the Kerner Commission. This countertrend began after the 1964 presidential election and gained momentum through public reaction to the urban disturbances and crime of the 1960s. The assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King and Senator Robert Kennedy in 1968 diminished the prospects that the 1964 countermovement could be slowed down.

The countermovement's ideology told the American middle class, the working class and the poor that they were on their own. Effectively communicated with vast resources, the 1964 countermovement blamed the poor for their problems; pretended that race and class divisions were not continuing American dilemmas; glorified the free market as an immutable force of nature that should be unregulated; misled average citizens into thinking that trickle down, corporate, supply side economics benefited them; dismissed government as an agent for effective change; illustrated its neglect with the levees of New Orleans and the I-35 Mississippi River Bridge of Minneapolis; used government to create tax breaks for the rich and corporations; encouraged the power of corporate lobbying over democratic decision making; and sought to hide inner city realities from public view by moving many poor minorities into the prison industrial complex, which seemingly is designed as an economic development strategy for primarily rural White areas.

## Top Ten Policy Recommendations

1. **A Win-Win Policy Strategy.** The Kerner Commission gave first policy priority to jobs, the economy and education. Similarly, today, as the Obama Administration implements its plans to reverse the economic crisis, the nation's top strategic domestic priority should be win-win employment, economic, trade, regulatory and education reforms that *simultaneously* benefit the anxious middle class, the neglected working class and the truly disadvantaged. Such a strategy can reinforce the new electoral alliance that emerged in the 2008 election. A stronger alliance can help even more to secure reforms in sync with Kerner priorities.
  
2. **Jobs and Economic Policy.** New demand side, Keynesian economic policy should empower American workers; communicate to the poor, working class and middle class that they need to band together; strengthen union organizing; link job training to job creation; and reverse the deregulation of corporations that has led, among many other problems, to the mortgage credit crisis that has had such devastating impact on working class and middle class families.

Specifically, the existing Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment Act should be strengthened to require the Federal Reserve to take action whenever the overall unemployment rate rises above 4 percent. The minimum wage needs to be raised to one-half of the average wage for blue collar workers and nonmanagers, and then indexed to that level. Universal health care and an increase in the Earned Income Tax Credit need to be enacted to further empower workers. The Employee Free Choice Act should be legislated to protect workers who seek to form unions.

A new Employment Training and Job Creation Act should replace the outmoded and ineffective Workforce Investment Act and the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program. The new Act should give equal priority to the poor, the working class and the middle class – including people who have lost their jobs to outsourcing and, more broadly, to the inequities of globalization. A new American job training and retraining system should draw on existing successful American job training models, like the Center for Employment Training, as well as take lessons from successful models in other industrialized nations, like Germany.

Trained and retrained American workers should be linked, as first priority, to jobs in sectors that need to be developed in the national interest – like health care, housing, school repair and construction, mass transit, other infrastructure development, energy and green technologies.

In response to the current recession, creation of these jobs should be central to a Keynesian economic stimulus package. Here we need to remember that, in the 1930s, President Franklin Roosevelt's initial fiscal stimulus was insufficient to reverse the Great Depression. (The fiscal stimulus of World War II finally turned around the economy.) It therefore will be important for the Obama Administration to create a



fiscal stimulus that, in the words of the Kerner Commission, is at “a scale equal to the dimension of the problems.” The policy should include a national infrastructure development bank and a new housing trust fund to develop affordable housing in mixed-income neighborhoods.

The empowerment of American workers cannot reasonably proceed without the reconstruction of a regulatory system based on the policies of the New Deal and the priorities of President Theodore Roosevelt. If there ever was a time to demand protection of and accountability to Main Street Americans, it is now. America needs a powerful and bipartisan oversight and control board to monitor implementation of a new financial system, anti-trust action to break up the power of the largest financial institutions, controls on the ability of banks to create unlimited credit, remuneration structures in financial institutions that are not biased in favor of reckless speculation, elimination of golden parachutes to Wall Street executives who led the speculation, limits on the remuneration of CEO’s in corporations that sell assets to the U.S. Treasury, restriction of the more toxic forms of derivatives and strict controls over the activities of hedge funds.

To assist the average citizen more, the federal government should be granted warrants to acquire stock in financial firms that profit from the federal bailout of 2008. Taxpayers should be able to share in the gain if the firms recover. Bankruptcy courts should be given the power to change mortgage provisions to keep people in their homes. Refinancing plans for borrowers should be implemented post haste.

The 2008 taxpayer-financed bailout, including financial assistance to banks and auto makers, must not be used as an excuse for again postponing the Kerner Commission’s job, economic, education and health priorities recommended here for the middle class, the working class and the truly disadvantaged. That is all the more reason to rescind the irresponsible 2001 and 2003 tax cuts to the rich. At the same time, tax cuts should be provided to the rest of the citizenry, as part of the federal government’s fiscal stimulus. This tax policy will be a step in reducing inequality.

3. **Globalization and Trade Policy.** The federal government should bring current policy to a halt, convene a National Commission on Globalization, and construct a new policy that better copes with global integration.

America must rebalance trade and be prepared to restrict imports through temporary across-the-board tariffs. The nation needs to end tax breaks for companies that ship jobs overseas and provide tax breaks to companies that create good jobs with decent wages in the United States. All trade agreements should contain provisions for enforceable labor rights and environmental standards, protect against trading partner manipulation of currencies to gain trade advantage, and allow state and federal government to favor domestic producers for purposes of economic development.

The North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) should be replaced by an agreement that gives workers the same attention and protections currently given to corporate investors. Imports that violate basic worker rights should be prohibited from entering the United States. The rights to organize, be free of abuse, be free of discrimination and to work in a safe environment should be protected.

Immigrants represent a critical resource for the American economy. Maximum civic incorporation of immigrants is fundamental to the American values of liberty, democracy and equal opportunity.

4. **Education Policy.** The failed No Child Left Behind Act should be replaced by an Education Equity Act. The federal government should begin to finance a system that creates equity in dollar investment per pupil across all school districts, as is done in most advanced industrialized countries. All public schools need comparable physical facilities, equipment, teacher training, teacher compensation, class sizes and curricula.

The Education Equity Act should fully fund Head Start preschool for all eligible poor children. We then need to replicate successful state equity models like Connecticut, which has raised and equalized teacher salaries, and North Carolina, which has recruited new teachers through service scholarships.

The Education Equity Act should include a Contract for College, which would re-orient federal aid toward grants and provide students with upfront and certain knowledge about the amount of aid available for them to plan for college. The Contract for College would unify the existing three strands of federal financial aid – grants, loans and work study – into one guaranteed financial aid package for students. Grants would make up the bulk of aid for students from poor, working class and many middle class families. The Contract would recognize the importance of reciprocity – so part of the Contract for every student would include student loans and work study requirements.

5. **National Urban Policy and Safe Haven Investment Neighborhoods.** The new White House Office on Urban Policy should carefully examine the lessons to be learned from the Carter Administration’s National Urban and Regional Policy. The policy goal should be White House insistence that historically “siloed” cabinet departments and agencies work collaboratively with metropolitan regions. Federal agency “turf battles” must be avoided. This is no easy task, but it is possible with strong leadership emanating from the White House.

As part of the Obama National Urban Policy, and building on the recommendations of the late Senator Robert Kennedy and the late Monsignor Geno Baroni, Safe Haven Investment Neighborhoods should be identified across the nation. The Investment Neighborhoods should include people in deepest poverty, other impoverished citizens and working class families. Drawing in part on the models of the Harlem Children’s Zone and the Eisenhower Foundation, Safe Haven Investment Neighborhoods should replicate best practices – programs already proven to work. In

each Safe Haven Investment Neighborhood, multiple and interdependent solutions should target multiple problems.

America has the technical knowledge to carry out these solutions. Since the Kerner Commission, scores of scientific evaluations have demonstrated what works. We therefore need to stop doing what doesn't work\* and start replicating what does work – at the Kerner Commission's "scale equal to the dimension of the problems."

What are examples of targeted multiple solutions that work? Proven community-based, citizen friendly, problem-oriented policing should help secure a Safe Haven Investment Neighborhood. The security should be used to encourage community-based banking, modeled after the South Shore Bank in Chicago. Community-based banking can help provide capital for community development corporations, like the Bedford-Stuyvesant Community Restoration Corporation created as part of Robert Kennedy's Mobilization for Youth and the New Community Corporation in the Central Ward of Newark created by Monsignor William Linder. Community development corporations can invest that capital in ways that help generate good jobs for local residents – for example, jobs in public infrastructure repair and creation, school repair, housing construction, health services, education services and transportation. High school drop outs can qualify for those jobs if they have been in the job training illustrated by Job Corps and YouthBuild USA, which have been evaluated as successful. Exoffenders returning to Safe Haven Investment Neighborhoods can qualify for the jobs if they participate in replications of models like Gemeinschaft Home, Pioneer Human Services, and the Safer Foundation.

Inner-city youth can stay in high school and go on to post-secondary education if they have been involved in human capital investments like the proven, computer-based Quantum Opportunities mentoring program. Youth can get to high school if they have been in Full Services Community Schools, the School Development Program of Professor James Comer at the Yale Child Study Center, after-school youth development and crime prevention safe havens modeled in part on the Japanese "koban" neighborhood police ministration system, and Harlem Children's Zone-type programs in middle school and primary school. Children can get to primary school better prepared if they have been in Head Start and Early Head Start preschool.

In concert with appropriate Congressional committees, the White House Office on Urban Policy should formulate and secure legislative approval of a quasi-governmental Safe Haven Investment Corporation to target such multiple solutions to multiple problems in clearly delineated neighborhoods. The Corporation should communicate to the nation that we have the technical knowledge to replicate what works to scale; identify the Investment Neighborhoods; co-target federal with local public and private funding; channel that funding in no small part to grassroots community-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations with demonstrated institutional capacity located in each Safe Haven Investment Neighborhood; provide technical

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\* For example, enterprise zones and zero tolerance policing have been oversold. In our final report, we also will caution against excessive reliance on buzz words like "self-sufficiency," "empowerment" and "faith based."

assistance to enhance the capacities of the 501(c)(3) organizations; transparently evaluate for success each year; and inform Congress, the Executive Branch and local nonprofit managers on the midcourse corrections needed.

6. **Poverty Reduction Policy.** The federal government should commit publicly to cutting the poverty rate in half and to significantly reducing income inequality by the fiftieth anniversary of the Kerner Commission, in 2018. American action should, in part, be modeled on the British government's public commitment to reducing poverty. The American National Academy of Sciences has concluded that the present federal definition of poverty is obsolete and greatly underestimates the poverty rate. The federal government should revise the definition based on the recommendations of the American National Academy of Sciences and on the Self Sufficiency Standard of Dr. Diana Pierce at the University of Washington.
7. **Policy Against Racial Injustice.** As inner-city and adjacent working class communities are economically developed via a new national urban policy that includes a Safe Haven Investment Act, income levels in those communities should begin to rise. It then may become easier to recommit the nation to racial desegregation and integration in our schools and neighborhoods, consistent with the recommendations of the Kerner Commission.

Attacked by the Executive Branch in the 1980s, school desegregation was effectively halted by the Supreme Court's 2007 Seattle decision. But national surveys show that two thirds of the population believes that desegregation improves education for minorities. A growing proportion of the population is aware of this reality and has accepted the research findings that desegregation has a positive impact on Whites, as well, according to the UCLA-based Civil Rights Project.

Such findings need to help anchor a new grassroots movement – a Fair Economic Deal (as discussed below) that pushes for more elected officials with priorities complementary to those of the Kerner Commission. In turn, such change can be a stepping stone for enlightened reform in the makeup of the courts, leading to reversal of the 2007 Supreme Court decision. Toward that end, the Supreme Court appointments of President Obama will be crucial.

With school and residential segregation so intertwined, a new movement should reformulate the most promising strategies for housing desegregation. To succeed with a comprehensive policy for stable, racially integrated neighborhoods, we need to promote the ability of racial minorities to move into White neighborhoods; encourage White families to move into minority neighborhoods; control market forces to insure that low income (especially minority) families are not pushed out of neighborhoods as a result of gentrification; and reduce racial discrimination by key players in the housing chain – including homebuilders, landlords, lenders, brokers, real estate agents and insurance companies.

Specific policies include reform of the Community Reinvestment Act and the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act to subject private mortgage lenders and homeowner insurance companies to regulatory oversight. We also need to replicate positively evaluated mobility strategies like the Chicago-initiated Gatreux program and the federal Moving to Opportunity program – as the government facilitates more affordable housing in mixed income neighborhoods through a new housing trust fund.

8. **Foreign Policy.** Based on what works, the domestic policy proposed here also is wise foreign policy. Today, authoritarian, nondemocratic countries criticize the American system for allowing the high levels of poverty, inequality, racial injustice, fear and crime documented on these pages. But the election of President Obama signals hope for beginning to resolve these problems, even though the current economic crisis could proscribe the kind of immediate progress that might be possible in a healthy economy.

If these American dilemmas eventually can be significantly reduced, the United States would begin to reestablish the world-wide respect that the “greatest generation” possessed at the end of World War II. America would gain a tremendous amount of “soft” power around the world. The soft power would help mend the coalitions with our allies that have been allowed to deteriorate in the new millennium. Combined with economic development and job-creating foreign aid to impoverished countries in the Middle East, Africa, Asia and South America, such new soft power would help America counter global poverty and inequality. As part of the hope generated by President Obama, America’s promise would be restored.

9. **Financing Reform.** Even though the economic recession requires patience in the implementation of Kerner priorities, we can at least begin to finance the reform proposed here – for example, by reversing the tax breaks given to the wealthiest Americans in 2001 and 2003. This will also begin to reduce inequality. Reversing the tax breaks to the rich could save about \$3.5 trillion over the next 10 years. We also need to close the tax loopholes that give America one of the lowest effective corporate tax rates in the industrialized world. At the same time, we need to reduce taxes on the great majority of Americans, as was done in the middle 1990s. Those working and middle class tax reductions of the 1990s generated a strong economic expansion that significantly reduced poverty and unemployment.
10. **A Fair Economic Deal.** To press for enactment of these recommendations, a new long term movement is needed to change political will in America and to expand the electoral majority that began to emerge in 2008 among the middle class, the working class and the truly disadvantaged.

The Obama Administration assembled a data base of over 10 million email addresses during the 2008 campaign – and is continuing to mobilize that base, now to generate a longer term movement.

The movement, which we are calling a Fair Economic Deal, simultaneously must be organized outside of Washington, DC and must take up where Dr. Martin Luther King left off when he was assassinated. Confederations and coalitions of nonprofit and labor organizations need to mobilize at the local and national levels. Many of the leadership organizations are in place, and many already are creating new coalitions for change.

Change must be engineered with the hope that, over the long run, a Fair Economic Deal will succeed in carrying out the priorities of the Kerner Commission.

As one point of departure, a movement for a Fair Economic Deal must frame a new language of public morality. Defined as pursuing the common ground, public morality is the natural high ground of a Fair Economic Deal that views every budgetary decision as a moral issue. The high moral ground must be taken back from the 1964 countermovement and its you're on your own ideology, a view of the world that is inconsistent with the empathy for others inherent in the experience of religion.

A Fair Economic Deal movement must articulate a narrative that unites the middle class, the working class and the poor as partners in the American story. Our narrative in this Kerner update is based on the values and priorities of two Republican Presidents and two Democratic Presidents – Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt and John Kennedy. Abraham Lincoln's investment in public infrastructure and crusade against racial injustice, Theodore Roosevelt's call for regulation of corporate greed, Franklin Roosevelt's social contract and fearlessness, and John Kennedy's focus on "what together we can do" to serve our country – all resonate with the hope of the Obama Administration and the priorities of the Kerner Commission.

Building on this presidential narrative, a movement for a Fair Economic Deal must take a decades-long strategic perspective.

The Fair Economic Deal movement must nurture and finance new grassroots leadership with fresh vision in the electoral world and in the world of nonprofit organizing and advocacy. Models for such reform include Wellstone Action, Progressive Majority, the White House Project, EMILY's List and the Center for Voting and Democracy.

An infrastructure of new nonprofit think tanks and more creative new hybrid institutions must advance positive new ideas, effectively communicate them and in the process discredit you're on your own ideologies. Models for such reform include the Century Foundation, Demos and the New America Foundation.

Other new hybrid organizations should, under the same institutional roofs, simultaneously identify and communicate what works and what doesn't, replicate successful grassroots models, evaluate replications, publish well-written policy analyses on these findings that are understandable to informed laypeople, and pursue

a much more ambitious strategy of policy forums, public outreach and advocacy. The Eisenhower Foundation is helping to create such multiple solution infrastructures.

Following the lead of Public Works, the FrameWorks Institute and the Council for Excellence in Government, we need to create a new public dialogue on how to make government work for everyone. America needs a system of well maintained “public structures” that include everything from physical infrastructure and social services to corporate regulation and reliable law enforcement.

Alternative media must be enhanced, a democratic Internet must be protected, and existing media reformed – to expose the failures of on your own ideology. A few of the many models to build on include Altnet.org, *Democracy Now*, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, Free Press, the *Guardian* newspaper’s Katine Project in Uganda, Independent World Television, Oh My News in Korea, *The Rachel Maddow Show* and TomPaine.com.

Once a movement for a Fair Economic Deal begins to gain some momentum, we can begin to press for even more fundamental reforms in the electoral process and the structure of American democracy.

For example, we need to prohibit lobbyists from soliciting and bundling big-check campaign donations from their business clients, severely limit corporate expenditures on lobbying and public relations intended to influence legislative outcomes, ban gifts to lawmakers by corporations or executives, prohibit privately financed junkets for legislators and aides, ban parties staged to generate corporate contributions to politicians, prohibit former legislators and public officials from lobbying for at least 5 years after they leave office, require lobbyists to disclose all lobbying expenditures, and mandate that all expert witnesses in legislative and regulatory hearings disclose financial relationships with economically interested parties.

These reforms should be monitored and enforced by an independent inspector general with power to investigate abuses and impose stiff penalties on violators.

The 2008 election suggested that the American people are ready to support a Fair Economic Deal. Many of the conclusions and policy recommendations in this update also are embraced by polling evidence. For example, 86 percent of Americans now believe that the country is seriously on the wrong track and 91 percent believe the economy is doing poorly, based on 2008 *Washington Post-ABC News* national polls. Over the last 2 decades, Pew polls show that a growing number of Americans understand, as we have documented, that the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. Over the same period, Pew polls show that a growing number of Americans believe that “it is the responsibility of the government to take care of people who can’t take care of themselves.” Pew and Gallup polls show support for raising the minimum wage, government relief for skyrocketing college costs, and government guarantees for universal health insurance, “even if it means repealing most of the recent tax cuts [for the rich].”

A majority of eligible voters favors Head Start and job training. Some 71 percent say educational improvement should focus on reforming existing public school systems. About 70 percent are willing to pay more in taxes if the money went to education, and 84 percent would pay more in taxes if the money went specifically to raising teachers' salaries, reducing class size, fixing run-down schools, improving security, and putting more computers in classrooms.

As the Obama Administration addresses America's many economic domestic and foreign problems, only 14 percent of American workers believe they have secured the American Dream:

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up  
Like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore –  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over  
Like a syrupy sweet?  
Maybe it just sags  
Like a heavy load.  
Or does it explode?

Harlem [2]  
Langston Hughes



Attachment 1:  
Selected Media Coverage

## King and Kerner: An Unfinished Agenda



Kerner Commission chairman Otto Kerner, left, with New York mayor and commission vice chairman John Lindsay in 1967. (By Bob Daughtery -- Associated Press)

*By Edward W. Brooke*

Thursday, April 3, 2008; Page A17

America has had much to reflect upon during the approach of the interrelated 40th anniversaries of the final report of the Kerner Commission, the assassination of the Rev. [Martin Luther King Jr.](#), and the round of riots that followed in Washington, [Baltimore](#), [Chicago](#) and well over 100 other cities across the nation. We have heard Sen. [Barack Obama](#)'s insightful speech on race and the reactions it provoked. Today, unfortunately, Dr. King's dream remains deferred.

Former senator Fred R. Harris and I are the two surviving members of President [Lyndon Johnson](#)'s National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (the formal name of the commission chaired by then-Illinois Gov. Otto Kerner). Our commission concluded that black frustration grew out of underrepresentation in the political system, the police, the media and all other aspects of American life. We urged new investments in jobs, schools and housing. We declared that poverty, inequality and segregation in the racial ghetto had created a destructive environment totally unknown to most white Americans. We avowed that white America had created and maintained the ghetto and that white society condoned it. These were strong words, but we believed that the truth needed telling.

I thought (and believe others did as well) that President Johnson would applaud our painstaking analysis and support our recommendations. But the president who had done so much for civil rights distanced himself from our findings. He did not invite us to the [White House](#) for the report's release, as was customary, nor did he embrace its recommendations.

In retrospect, I can see that our report was too strong for him to take. It suggested that all of his great achievements -- his civil rights legislation, his anti-poverty program, Head Start, housing legislation and all the rest of the Great Society -- had been only a beginning. We asked him, in an election year, to endorse the idea that white America bore much of the responsibility for black

rioting and rebellion. However true that might have been, the message was politically too hot to handle.

Members of our commission could scarcely have envisioned the strides African Americans have made since the report's release or conceived of the growing numbers, progress and influence of Hispanic Americans.

With the ascendancy of an African American contender for the presidency, dispassionate observers might gasp at how far we have come in two generations. The achievements in business, entertainment, sports and politics that black and Hispanic Americans have made are notable, but not for their exception.

Yet, despite the visibility of accomplished African Americans and Hispanics and the progress in race relations that has been made in this country, for America's poor -- those who do not know what health care is because for them it doesn't exist, those for whom prison is a more likely prospect than college, those who have been abandoned to the worst of decaying, crime-ridden urban centers because of the flight of middle-class blacks, whites and Hispanics -- the future may be as bleak as it was for their counterparts in the 1960s.

The core conditions that the Kerner Commission identified as key contributors to civil unrest are as prevalent, if not as virulent, today as they were 40 years ago. The lack of affordable, safe housing and the absence of jobs or hope for the future have confined even more of our citizens to an eerily familiar world that not so long ago gave rise to cities in flames.

Until we root out and eradicate the conditions that cultivate generations in deprivation and despair, we are bound to harvest a bitter crop.

Fulfilling Dr. King's dream will require economic and health security, worker empowerment, job training and retraining, job creation, and high-quality education for the minority poor as well as neglected blue-collar workers and the anxious middle class.

The Eisenhower Foundation -- of which I was a trustee for many years -- recently released a strategy to this end. A new movement for a Fair Economic Deal based on a coalition of these citizens could become the basis for creating what the Kerner Commission called "new will."

If political will can be changed over the long run, perhaps we can begin to address even more difficult issues -- such as how to return to racial integration, how to take on corporate and lobbyist control of the political process, how to enact real campaign finance reform, and how to reverse media consolidation.

We have come far, but we still have so far to go. Let us not wait until another anniversary, whether a decade or even another year, to get there.

*Edward W. Brooke, a Republican from Massachusetts, was the first African American elected to the U.S. Senate. He was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2004.*

# Goals for black America not met

By [Marisol Bello](#), USA TODAY  
February 28, 2008



Kyntrel Runnels, left, researches online as Ollye Shirley watches. School integration rose only four percent since 1968 and is one of the Commission's benchmarks that points toward unfinished work in achieving racial equality in the USA.

The USA has made great strides in the past four decades toward expanding a black middle class and producing black political leaders, including the first viable candidate for president. Yet blacks still lag behind whites significantly in income, education and other measures of well-being, a study out today concludes.

Forty years after the Kerner Commission warned of a country heading toward "two societies, one black, one white — separate and unequal," the Eisenhower Foundation, a private urban-policy institute, finds the country has failed to meet the goals laid out by the presidential commission.

**FORTY YEARS LATER:** [Read the new assessment](#)  
**PROGRESS:** [Programs for urban blacks lauded](#)

The report echoes findings by the National Urban League, which will release its annual State of Black America next week. It says the median household income for blacks in 2006, \$31,696, was 60% of whites' median household income.

The Kerner Commission, appointed by President Johnson to study civil disorders of the 1960s, pointed to problems of black America. It proposed solutions for chronic unemployment, segregation in housing and schools, and poverty. It was the first time a federal report identified racism as a problem.

**FIND MORE STORIES IN:** [TVs](#) | [Hispanics](#) | [Heritage Foundation](#) | [President Johnson](#) | [National Urban League](#) | [State of Black America](#) | [Kerner Commission](#) | [Alan Curtis](#) | [Eisenhower Foundation](#)

Former senator and commission member Fred Harris and some commission staff formed the Eisenhower Foundation to continue the panel's work.

"Forty years later, overall, we give America a D in meeting the goals" of the commission, says Alan Curtis, the Eisenhower Foundation's president.

The report finds:

- The poverty gap between blacks and whites has narrowed since 1968 as the percentage of blacks in poverty dropped from 35% to 24%. Still, blacks are three times as likely as whites — and Hispanics twice as likely — to live in extreme poverty.

- School integration has declined in the past two decades. Today, 27% of black students attend mostly white schools, up from 23% in 1968 but down from 37% during the 1980s.

Robert Rector, a senior policy fellow at the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank, says the report fails to show the gains made by the poorest. He says federal statistics show the average poor family has two color TVs, a car, air conditioning and a washer and dryer.

Rector says the report ignores a major cause of poverty: single-parent homes. He says 70% of black children do not have a father in the home.



## ■ Readers' opinions



### **Economic, social and family factors craft inner city hurdles**

**Elliott Currie, member, Kerner Commission, 40th Anniversary Task Force, Eisenhower Foundation - Washington**

USA TODAY's story on the report on the state of the inner cities by the [Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation](#) concludes with a statement by Robert Rector of the Heritage Foundation. Rector said that the report "ignores a major cause of poverty: single parent homes." He goes on to say that the majority of black children "do not have a father in the home" ("[Goals for black America not met](#)," News, Feb. 28).

*(Photo - Mock debate: At an after-school program in Mississippi, Lamarqus Green (left) portrays Barack Obama, while Author Bryant (right) stands in for Hillary Clinton. / By Greg Campbell for USA TODAY)*

The implication is that it's the heedless behavior of black men — rather than the strains of a blighted economy and a legacy of discrimination — that is responsible for the continuing [crisis of poverty](#) and racial disadvantage 40 years after the Kerner Commission.

The Kerner Commission was appointed by President Lyndon Johnson to study the civil problems of the 1960s. It concluded, for the first in a federal report, that racism was a significant problem.

The fact that the majority of people living in poverty are white is also ignored. No one disputes that two-parent families are less likely to be poor. But what Rector fails to ask is why there are so many "fatherless" families in the inner city.

Conservatives used to blame the welfare system for providing perverse incentives for women to have children without marrying. We don't hear that explanation much any more, since we still have those startlingly high figures on single motherhood more than 10 years after we ended welfare as we know it.

The Eisenhower report addresses some of the real reasons:

- \* Jobless rates among black men that remain stratospheric even in times of economic growth.
- \* The retreat from an already minimal national commitment to investment in job creation and training.
- \* A stunning rise in incarceration of black men with no corresponding effort to reintegrate them on their release into productive roles in the community.

Study after study details the devastating effect of these failures on the ability to maintain stable family relationships.

A real, rather than rhetorical, commitment to strengthening the family would start by tackling the social and economic forces that threaten it.



## Programs for urban blacks lauded

By **Marisol Bello**, USA TODAY

February 28, 2008



By Greg Campbell for USA TODAY

Lamarqus Green, left, responds to a question from Author Bryant, right, during a mock debate Monday in the Quantum Opportunities Program in Jackson, Miss.

At Lanier High School in Jackson, Miss., 10 of the school's lowest-performing students have improved their grades or even made the honor roll with the help of an after-school mentoring program.

In Harrisonburg, Va., 60 inmates awaiting release are earning advanced degrees, getting job training and finding work through a program that helps them rebuild their lives.

**FORTY YEARS LATER:** [Read the new assessment](#)  
**'SEPARATE AND UNEQUAL':** [Goals for black America not met](#)

Two programs, two populations, same mission: reduce poverty by providing education, job training and enrichment opportunities to the most disadvantaged.

The efforts are among those lauded in a new report exploring the country's progress on racial equality, poverty and crime 40 years after the Kerner Commission issued its report identifying the problems that burdened urban blacks.

The report, released today by the Eisenhower Foundation, a policy group formed by a former Kerner Commission member and former staff members, makes recommendations:

- Increase funding for national programs such as Head Start, which promotes early childhood education; Safe Haven and Quantum Opportunities, which offer after-school tutoring and mentoring; and the Gemeinschaft Home, a residential program in Harrisonburg that helps inmates make the transition from prison.
- Raise the federal minimum wage from the current \$5.85 an hour.
- Create a federal Employment Training and Job Creation Act.



The report does not put a price tag on its proposals.

"We know what works," says Alan Curtis, the foundation's president, who wrote the report. "It's a matter of having the political will to do it."

The report finds that from 1980 through 2000, three times as many black men went to prison as went to college. In 2000, half of the 800,000 black men in prison did not have the literacy skills needed in the job market.

Lanier High School's Quantum Opportunities Program is one of eight serving 240 students around the country. A study by the Ford Foundation found that 63% of students in the program graduated from high school and 42% enrolled in college or vocational school. By comparison, 36% of blacks 18 and older had graduated from high school in 2006, and 28% had some college experience or an associate's degree, the U.S. Department of Education says.

The program at Lanier started two years ago with 30 students. Only about 10 regularly attend the after-school program, where they get one-on-one tutoring and mentoring, says Ollye Shirley, the program's director.

The students go on field trips to colleges, museums and restaurants.

It has opened up the world for Jonathan Jones, 17, a junior, who was a C student and now has made the honor roll twice. For the first time, he's thinking about going to college. The program provides a basic tool: a computer.

"I don't have a computer at home, and we know the computer is the new access to the world," he says. "Here, I have the world."

Robert Woodson, head of the conservative Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, says the report and its recommendations "are steeped in victimization."

Woodson opposes more federal spending on programs in inner cities. He says they reinforce dependency.

"The government has spent something like \$13 trillion in 30 years to aid the poor," he says. "It's created a perverse incentive to maintain people in poverty."

William Lucas doesn't see it that way. He says the Gemeinschaft Home program wasn't a handout for him.

A former drug addict who spent nine years in prison for drug crimes, Lucas, 55, says it taught him self-reliance so he could do things on his own, such as hold a job, get an apartment and open a bank account.

Today, Lucas works at the home counseling other inmates as they get ready to be released. It's the first time he's held a full-time job.

"If every town had a Gemeinschaft, guys wouldn't be going back to prison," he says.

## **katine** it starts with a village



### **Katine project wins praise**

The Eisenhower Foundation, an international group based in Washington that seeks to find solutions to urban poverty and disadvantage, has called for the Guardian's Katine project to be replicated in inner cities across America

Ed Pilkington

Thursday, March 13, 2008



People at the shrine to a 19-month-old baby shot dead in the still-troubled neighbourhood of Watts in Los Angeles. Photograph: David McNew/Getty

A leading US organisation dedicated to finding and evaluating ways to reduce poverty, inequality and racial injustice in inner cities is studying the possibility of replicating the Guardian's Katine project across America.

The [Eisenhower Foundation](#), a Washington-based group set up in the wake of the urban unrest that swept through the US in the 1960s and the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy in 1968, has singled out the Katine project for praise as part of its review of the challenges still facing the country 40 years later. The foundation's preliminary report says the Katine project is, "one of the most promising new variations on the public journalism theme" where media outlets act as, "participant in community life rather than as detached spectators".

Alan Curtis, the president of the foundation, said he had been following the Katine project almost since its inception. "I thought it a monumental idea as we search for ways to give power back to the people in the neighbourhoods in which they work."

The foundation was set up in 1981 as a not-for-profit body to continue the government-backed work of two seminal 1960s commissions – the Kerner Commission that investigated the causes of the disturbances in cities across the US, notably in the Watts neighbourhood of Los Angeles in 1966 and in Detroit and Newark in 1967; and the Violence Commission which looked into the killings of King and Kennedy. The Violence commission was set up by Milton Eisenhower, brother of Dwight D.

The foundation's 40-year review reaches some worrying initial conclusions. Almost 40 million Americans live in poverty today in the richest country in history, and the child poverty rate has increased slightly, from 15 per cent in 1968 to 17 per cent in 2006.

The review also looked for examples of good practice that would provide clues to the way ahead, hence its reference to Katine. Curtis said the foundation was keen to encourage an experiment based on the Katine model in a couple of medium-sized American cities such as Peoria, Illinois or Des Moines, Iowa.

The foundation would facilitate the start of such projects, and then help evaluate them. But Curtis stressed that the Katine model would only succeed if it was embraced by local people.

"This can't be top down. Unless there is a newspaper prepared to take it on, it won't work."

The preliminary report notes the way that the Guardian's print and online coverage acts as a kind of process of evaluation, monitoring whether villagers' lives improve as well as encouraging debate. It also notes the involvement of the African Medical and Research Foundation (Amref) as partner to avoid the danger of British Empire-style colonialism or the top-down approach of the World Bank.

The report, which will form the basis of a final review to be published later this year, also records the involvement of Barclays Bank as financial partner.

It says that projects modelled on Katine in American urban areas could lead to "newspapers facilitating the development of clearly-defined inner city neighbourhoods".

"It occurred to us that what the Guardian was doing in Africa had some similarities with what we were trying to do in our inner cities – with the new dimension that a progressive newspaper headed it up. That's an important hypothesis," Curtis said.

## **Extract from the Eisenhower Foundation's report**

"One of the most promising new variations on the public journalism theme is the Katine project. Katine is a small, impoverished area in north-east Uganda – without electricity, water, good healthcare, good education and many other basics. But the Guardian newspaper of London has launched a human and physical capital investment initiative to begin to turn this around.

The Guardian is the initiative's facilitator. It is documenting conditions in Katine and, through local reporters, publishing stories on Katine residents. The Guardian's print and online coverage amounts to a kind of process evaluation of what happens and whether the lives of villages are changed for the better. Constructive debates on what to do and on what is happening are being blogged on the Guardian's Katine portal. The Guardian has selected a non-governmental organisation, Amref, as its partner. Amref will provide training and technical assistance to villagers – for example, in healthcare, teaching and water acquisition. The Guardian promises that Amref will create a 'bubble-up' process whereby villagers will be empowered to take the. (Some Guardian bloggers have warned that the process could easily degenerate into British Empire colonialism and World Bank-type top-down control).

The Guardian's other initial partner is Barclays Bank, which is providing upfront financing and match funding as the project hopefully evolves in a positive way. The Guardian is raising match contributions on its website.

The Eisenhower Foundation is exploring the possibility of Kerner-inspired replications in the United States – with newspapers facilitating the development of clearly defined inner city neighbourhoods."

## It Was Always Headed Here

Obama invited some serious thinking, an invitation that's been extended many times in the past.

By [Ellis Cose](#) | NEWSWEEK

Mar 31, 2008 Issue | Updated: 1:10 p.m. ET Mar 22, 2008

Last Wednesday, [Barack Obama](#) finally found himself in a role that he had previously managed to avoid: that of explaining the history and challenges of race to America. It is a potentially treacherous place to be—and that he was there was partly his own fault. Obama could have moved more nimbly, more deftly and more pre-emptively to distance himself from the jarring—and, arguably, anti-American—remarks of his outspoken former pastor, Jeremiah Wright Jr.

But even had Wright not been a factor, it was inevitable that Obama would have been forced to make a major speech on race. He and his campaign always have been defined, in part, in racial terms. That says more about America than about Obama. He has tried hard to make the case that his candidacy is more about health care, economic opportunity and getting out of Iraq than about race. Yet he cannot escape perceptions and preconceptions based on the color of his skin. (It is telling that in our uniquely American taxonomy, Obama is almost always described as a black man with a white mother and never as a white man with a black father.) Many, of course, see his race in a positive light. Americans are eager to see his candidacy as a sign that racial divisions can be overcome, that we have moved beyond (or that he can move us beyond) the racial acrimony at the base of so much pain.

But it was not just such benign, generally unstated assumptions that forced Obama to play the role of racial teacher. It was also an unending stream of race-baiting silliness emanating from people with strong opinions about his candidacy. There was Bill Clinton, who seemed inclined to make Obama out as a latter-day Jesse Jackson. There was Gloria Steinem, who, in an op-ed, stopped just short of saying it would be unfair for a black man—instead of a white woman—to be offered the keys to the White House. Then there was Geraldine Ferraro, famous largely because she was once selected to run for vice president. She believes Obama "would not be in this position" if he had been born a white man. Never mind that most of us would probably not be in our current positions if we were fundamentally something other than what we are. Never mind that Hillary Clinton's candidacy would not exist were she not a woman—since no man could

run largely on the basis of credentials garnered by being the spouse of a former president (at least not until same sex-marriage is more acceptable than it is now).

To his credit, Obama chose not to respond to the silliness with more silliness—which, given the touchiness of race and the seeming inability of different groups to see the same picture in the same way, was probably the politically clever thing to do. Instead, he invited Americans of all hues to engage in a serious, sustained thinking through of our shared history and to focus on the continuing ramifications of slavery, America's "original sin."

It is an invitation that has been extended many times in the past, by orators even more eloquent than Obama—Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr. among them. The lesson of history seems to be that the invitation is accepted only in times of crisis, when racial divisions, or race-related violence, threaten to tear the country apart.

Obama's hope is that this time is different. So it would have been nice to hear him talk more about why it is different, and what will actually cause us to come together to deal with income disparity, segregated schools and the unhealed scars of past inequities. What will cause blacks to put aside their anger, whites to set aside their resentments and people of all colors to eschew the dance of blame and denial that makes coalescing around common problems difficult? His only answer is that we have no choice. But of course we do.

Forty years ago, President Lyndon Johnson's Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders released an acclaimed (and reviled) report that attempted to explain the urban riots of that era. That report challenged America to acknowledge its history of discrimination and its lingering effects and to end racial inequality. This year the Eisenhower Foundation, which considers itself the commission's successor, issued a report saying that not nearly enough has changed. Its CEO, Alan Curtis, like Obama, is banking on the hope that maybe this time is different. By focusing on the educational and economic problems that affect Americans of all colors, Curtis aspires to stimulate a new movement to meet the challenge the commission issued so many years ago.

But if the past is a guide, it seems more likely that the foundation's new report, like Obama's beautifully crafted speech, will stimulate some interesting discussions but little action. Indeed, Obama may well find some of his words hurled back at him by politicians, or their surrogates, less subtle of mind. They'll be intent on making him out to be not a transcendent, unifying figure, but just another black man wallowing in a history many Americans would rather forget.

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Thursday, February 28, 2008

## **Kerner Commission: Not enough progress made on poverty**

**Darren A. Nichols / The Detroit News**

Little progress has been made for African-Americans in key areas such as poverty, racial injustice, education and crime in the 40 years since racially charged urban riots across the county, according to an update of the landmark Kerner Commission released this morning.

Despite an emerging black middle class and increases in entrepreneurs and public officials at all levels, the commission that famously warned the United States is moving toward "two societies, one black, one white -- separate and equal" found that few goals have been met since its 1968 findings.

Its grade on progress for African-Americans: D+. It's a mark that resonates in metropolitan Detroit, the nation's most segregated region.

"There is nothing I can point to in our present day experience that tell us that we are significantly better off today than we were (then)," said Arthur Johnson, former president of the Detroit branch NAACP. "The income gap is real and something we have the right to argue about. It has come to a point where we must tell this nation that we are not going to accept the mis-education and the misdirection of education resources."

Last year, the Washington D.C.-based Eisenhower Foundation reconvened the commission during the 40th anniversary of the 1967 riots. The initial 11-member panel, appointed by President Lyndon Johnson after rioting in 100 cities, warned the nation faced a "system of apartheid" in major cities and urged legislation to create jobs and improve housing. Johnson rejected the findings and they further languished the next year with the election of Richard Nixon.

The updated findings were compiled through hearings in Detroit, Newark and Washington, D.C, which all rioted in the 1960s. A final report will be released this year.

It found:

- Some employers still "steer" minority applicants into the worst jobs; real-estate agents send them to less desirable neighborhoods and mortgage lenders accept fewer applications than those from similar whites.
- Unemployment and underemployment were the most important causes of poverty, yet African-American unemployment remains twice as high as white unemployment during each of the four decades since 1968. About 37 million Americans live in poverty, while 46 million Americans are without health insurance.
- Educational disparities remain linked to funding. The wealthiest 10 percent of school districts in the U.S. spend nearly 10 times more than the poorest 10 percent.

The report called for the following remedies: boosting the \$5.85 an hour minimum wage beyond the \$7.25 an hour it's set to increase to in 2009; passing laws to require the Federal Reserve to take action whenever unemployment increases past 4 percent; approving the Employee Free Choice Act to make it easier to form unions; increased job training and college grants for low-income students and make funding for public school districts more equitable.

The results may come as a shock to some -- reflecting a divide in perception that still persists.

The Eisenhower report echoes findings by The News' two-day series published last July that found the white-black gap still persists. Black incomes in Detroit are down since 1970, while they're up for whites. More blacks are going to college than ever before, but nearly twice as many whites are too. The white-black employment gap is the same now as it was in 1960.

"It's kind of telling given all of the bickering and finger-pointing by some that (suggest) Detroit has gotten into the predicament by itself," said the Rev. Horace Sheffield III, Michigan chapter president of the National Action Network.

"It's not new to me, (but) it's something suburbanites want to ignore and say we alone are responsible for the deplorable plight of the city, which is not true."

Maureen Taylor, who served on Detroit's panel last November, said the Eisenhower findings weren't harsh enough. She would have recommended a D-.

"There is no war against poverty in America," said Taylor, the state chairwoman of the Michigan Welfare Rights Organization.

"There is a war against the poor. We have to go and change the circumstances of poverty."



But many are still optimistic. A Detroit News poll conducted found six in 10 African-Americans said they feel blacks have made at least some economic progress since 1967. Ulysses Chauffe, a 54-year-old west-side Detroit resident, said he doesn't see it as a lack of progress, but rather people who are not taking advantage of the resources available to them.

"I don't know if I perceive it the same way," Chauffe said. "This generation is more informed and has more tools available to them than past generations. It's whether or not you grasp onto that. I don't think that more so than (in the past) it's we're under some type of glass ceiling that keeps us from progressing. It's ourselves."

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## **Still separate and unequal 40 years after Kerner**

**By *RICHARD M. LERNER***

**Posted: Feb. 29, 2008**

Forty years ago, the seminal National Advisory on Civil Disorders, called the Kerner Commission after its chairman, Illinois Gov. Otto Kerner, concluded that we are moving to two societies: one black, one white; separate and unequal. During this political season, the media has reported that one or another candidate for president is "playing the race card."

Whatever the validity of these reports, it is in fact true that race issues are still played out daily in our nation. Structural racism, social factors that persist in dividing our nation on the basis of race, is a ubiquitous part of the American landscape. For no group is this more evident than minority youth, who have made only limited progress since the March 1968 Kerner Commission report.

On this 40th anniversary, it is a good time to consider the current challenges for minority youth. The disparities paint a stunning portrait of inequality.

In Wisconsin, a 2006 report from the Office of Juvenile Justice indicated that custody rates (per 100,000 youth) for Hispanics were more than six times greater, and for black youth were more than nine times greater, than was the case for white youth.

Nationally, black youth are referred to juvenile justice courts at a rate twice their proportion in the population. Even when charged with the same offense, black youth are more likely to be placed into detention facilities than are whites. In turn, black and Latino youth are less likely to be placed on probation than are white youth.

Black and Latino newborns in the United States today are 300% more likely to grow up in poverty than are white newborns. Poverty is a major basis of other facets of structural racism - affecting health, education, employment and ultimately feelings of hope for the future.

The mortality rate for infants born to black mothers is more than twice as high as corresponding mortality rates for infants born to white mothers. If they live, black youth receive fewer primary care or mental health services than their white peers. These racial differences exist even when socioeconomic status and insurance status are taken into account.

The amount of state and local tax revenue spent per student varies substantially in relation to the level of minority enrollment in a school district. For instance, across the nation, between 1996 and 2000, an average of \$6,684 was spent per pupil in districts with the lowest minority enrollment. In districts with the highest minority enrollment, the corresponding expenditure averaged \$5,782.

In 1972, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that 50.5% of the total population of youth, aged 16 to 19, was jobless. The corresponding percentage for blacks was 70.5%. In 1995, the percentages of joblessness for all youth in this age range and for blacks was 49.2% and 72.6%, respectively. In 2003, the corresponding percentages were 59.1% and 78.3%, respectively.

The Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation, the private-sector continuation of the landmark commission, is chaired by Sen. Fred Harris (D-Okla.), one of only two living members of the original body. In its 40-year update of Kerner, it finds that America earns a D+ in progress on race, poverty, crime and inequality. Nowhere is that failing grade more evident than in the status of minority youth.

We cannot deny the data or try to explain the facts away by claiming they reflect the outcomes of personal or cultural shortcomings. Combating racism begins with Americans evaluating their own values and behavior about race. Race needs to be dealt with by elected officials in a transparent, objective and proactive manner. All Americans must reject the idea that different life chances for racial groups are somehow natural or expected.

Today's political challenge is to speak forthrightly about racial inequality and to no longer accept racial injustice. We must demand that our presidential candidates address racial disparities in the lives of our children and explain how they will create a socially just nation for all of America's youth.

"Liberty and justice for all" must not remain empty words for our nation's children of color.

*Richard M. Lerner is the Bergstrom Chair in Applied Developmental Science and the Director of the Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development at Tufts University in Medford, Mass.*



## Milwaukee reflects grim statistics

**Poverty, inequality still pervade after 40 years, U.S. report says**

*By GEORGIA PABST*

[gpabst@journalsentinel.com](mailto:gpabst@journalsentinel.com)

**Posted: Feb. 29, 2008**

Forty years ago this week, the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders - the Kerner Commission - issued its landmark report on poverty, inequality, racial injustice and crime in America.

Today, Milwaukee mirrors the grim statistics on deepening poverty and racial inequality outlined in a new report that updates the Kerner Commission's findings, said a researcher who worked on the anniversary report.

"Unfortunately, it strikes me that Milwaukee continues to be a leader in so many unfortunate measures, such as unemployment, mortgage rates, incarceration and segregation," said Gregory D. Squires, chairman of the sociology department at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

Middle-income Milwaukee neighborhoods declined in number, he said, while wealthy and poor neighborhoods increased. In 1970, the city had 11 census tracts in which 40% or more of the residents were poor, but by 2000, that had jumped to 43 census tracts.

According to U.S. Census figures, Milwaukee's poverty rate now ranks in the top 10 cities, and 1 out of 3 children in Milwaukee Public Schools is living in poverty.

"In many ways, Milwaukee not only mirrors but is ahead of the curve in terms of key measures of inequality, and racial inequality in particular," said Squires, who taught at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee before moving to Washington in 2000. "Clearly, Milwaukee is the type of community the 40th-anniversary Kerner report is writing about."

President Johnson convened the Kerner Commission after riots rocked many cities - including Milwaukee - in the late 1960s. The preliminary update, from a bipartisan task force of more than 40 experts that was set up by the Eisenhower Foundation, concludes that little progress has been made in reducing poverty and racial injustice, with the poor getting poorer and a growing divide between rich and poor.

The new report highlights advances made, such as the substantial expansion of an African-American and Latino middle class. Minority entrepreneurship has greatly expanded, and voters have elected large numbers of minority local and state officials. It notes that an African-American is running for president and a Latino was a candidate in the early primaries.

But for the most part, the report says, "America has failed to meet the commission's goals of reducing poverty, inequality, racial injustice and crime."

"Poverty is now more concentrated, and people in the central cities have been left behind," said Fred Harris, who was a Democratic U.S. senator from Oklahoma and is one of the two living members of the original 1968 Kerner Commission, and who served on the anniversary task force.

The growth of poverty in Milwaukee doesn't surprise Dexter Liggins, 35, who has been going to the Milwaukee Urban League offices for about a year to search for a job on the Internet.

Without a car, he can't get to the good jobs in the suburbs and outlying counties, he said.

"It just makes sense to me that the poor are poorer," he said. "Just look around. The city is plagued with crime and drugs that keep the inner city down, while the jobs go out to areas without bus service. . . . Milwaukee used to have jobs, but they left."

Mayor Tom Barrett said Milwaukee and the nation need policies to bring about equity in jobs, housing, contracting procedures, lending practices and education.

"That's why I'm focusing a lot on jobs and work force development," he said. "It's not a panacea, but it's a start."

Ralph Hollmon, president and chief executive officer of the Milwaukee Urban League, said massive public works programs with public service jobs should be created to help people earn money and restore and instill the values of work to a generation that's lost hope.

## Letters to the Editor

March 13, 2008

### 40 years after the Kerner Report

It's encouraging that the editors ("Race in America, 40 years out," Editorial, Feb. 29), recognize the substantial contributions of the Kerner Report, especially its insistence that "racism in America exists, and matters." But their argument that the report's remedies were mostly failed big-government approaches designed to increase dependency is curious.

The editorial tells us that the "Kerner standard" was based on the view that what black Americans needed was "not help making it into society, but a respite from society; in effect, they should be pensioned off..." Yet central to the report's recommendations, as The Times piece acknowledges, was the call for a million new jobs to be created in the public sector and another million in the private sector — along with large increases in money for job training.

Why, exactly, would creating 2 million new jobs and offering the training to put people in them amount to "pensioning off" black Americans? How could putting the unemployed to work be equated with offering them a "respite from society"?

The editorial argues that the Moynihan Report of 1964 had a better understanding of the roots of the ills of the black community — "broken families." But although it's often forgotten, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, unlike The Times' editors, never made the mistake of separating the problem of broken families from the larger economic forces that helped to create them.

On the contrary: Mr. Moynihan traced the troubles of inner-city black families directly to the destructive effects of joblessness, and his report was designed in part as a brief against what he later described as the "intolerable" levels of unemployment in America.

The failure — and the tragedy — is not that we put this central recommendation into practice, but that we didn't. Had we done so, the bifurcation within the black community that the editors decry wouldn't exist in the form it takes today. We are still paying for this default, and we will continue to pay until we summon the political will to put full employment back at the center of our national agenda.

ELLIOTT CURRIE

Co-chair

Eisenhower Foundation Kerner Commission 40th Anniversary Task Force  
Washington

## Letters to the Editor

March 16, 2008

### Poverty statistics

In the editorial on the 40th anniversary of the Kerner Commission ("Race in America, 40 years out," Feb. 29), The Washington Times misleadingly states that black poverty "has dropped from 34 percent to 25 percent ... ."

More accurately, black poverty decreased 17 percent from 1966 to 1968, decreased by less than 1 percent from 1969 to 1980, increased almost 3 percent from 1981 to 1992, decreased by almost 33 percent from 1993 to 2000 and increased 7 percent from 2001 to 2006.

In other words, the net drop in black poverty since the Kerner Commission is mostly due to the 1966-1968 and 1992-2000 periods when America had tight labor markets and (in the 1990s) tax breaks for workers and the middle class. By contrast, black poverty increased during the 1981 to 1992 and 2001 to 2006 periods of trickle-down supply-side economics and tax breaks to the rich and corporations.

Accordingly, in its 40-year update of the Kerner Commission, the Eisenhower Foundation sets forth a policy that empowers workers and recommitts the nation to job training, job retraining and job creation for the truly disadvantaged, the neglected working class and the anxious middle class.

The foundation's update also documents how overall child poverty (for all races) has increased since 1968 and how the real poverty rate is much higher than the absurdly low official definition. The alternative Self-Sufficiency Standard definition of poverty constructed by professor Diana Pearce at the University of Washington is more accurate.

ALAN CURTIS  
President  
Eisenhower Foundation  
Washington

## Bill Moyers Journal



**March 28, 2008**

**BILL MOYERS:** Welcome to the JOURNAL.

You have to go searching deep into their websites, to find out what the presidential candidates think about urban issues. Their speeches on the subject have been few and far between, and during all those debates of the past year, cities were rarely mentioned. Perhaps it's because to talk about cities, we have to think about the very touchy subject of race. Or perhaps the culprit is amnesia; we've simply forgotten the past that produced the urban challenges of today. Here's what I mean:

The official name for it was the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. But it passed through the press into popular lore as the Kerner Commission report, and that's how it's remembered today — at least to those of us old enough to remember. If you think all the talk about race in this presidential campaign is savage, you should have been around 40 years ago, in 1968, when this report was published. Talk about controversy! The Kerner Report was an unflinching portrait of America — and it was born from the flames of exploding cities.

**BILL MOYERS:** July 1967, Newark, New Jersey goes up in flames. Reacting to a rumor that police had beaten and allegedly killed a local man, residents protested peacefully at first. But then the scene turned violent.

For six days, state troops and police clashed in the streets with rioters. Twenty-six people were killed, including a ten year old boy.

Six days later, it happened again in Detroit, Michigan

**NEWS REPORTER:** Detroit. It looked like the wartime blitz on London, but this was no war, it was arson, looting, a race riot blowing up into something beyond control.

**BILL MOYERS:** Triggered by another police action, and another angry protest gone haywire, the destruction of downtown Detroit was worse than Newark's... the nation watched on TV as Detroit was torn apart.



As reports poured in of snipers shooting at police, President Lyndon Johnson called in the army to put an end to the violence. Thousands of blacks were rounded up, and a curfew was thrown over the city.

Five days on, forty-three people were dead, hundreds wounded, and block after block of inner-city Detroit was destroyed. Locals picked through the ruins, stunned and confused. Detroit's mayor said his city looked "like Berlin in 1945"

It wasn't just Newark and Detroit that erupted that year. Scores of other cities seemed under siege.

**NEWS REPORTER:** In 1967, 126 cities were hit by racial violence, with 75 incidents classified as major riots.

**BILL MOYERS:** The country was stunned and terrified...what was driving these events? President Johnson felt compelled to act.

**LYNDON JOHNSON:** We need to know the answer, I think, to three basic questions about these riots: What happened, why did it happen, what can be done to prevent it from happening again and again.

**BILL MOYERS:** To answer those questions, LBJ appointed what became known as the Kerner Commission... named for its Chairman, Illinois Governor Otto Kerner. New York City's Mayor John Lindsay was Vice-Chair.

The youngest member of the panel was a populist senator from Oklahoma named Fred Harris. Just in his 30s at the time, and coming from a mostly white state, Harris nonetheless went to the floor of the Senate and called on the president to fully and publicly reckon with these awful events.

**SENATOR FRED HARRIS:** It's gonna take a national commitment, a massive kind of national commitment and anything less than that will not cure the ills that we have, and poverty generally, and the problems of race and the problems of our cities.

**BILL MOYERS:** The President listened. He was furious about these riots. Believing that militant groups such as the black panthers must've somehow been behind the violence.

But when the Kerner Commission's work was done, its findings would shake Lyndon Johnson, and the country. The Kerner Report became a moment of clarity for America. A time when the nation was forced to focus on the harsh realities of racism, poverty and injustice in our cities.

**BILL MOYERS:** On the 40th anniversary of this historic Kerner Commission Report, I asked that formerly-young Populist Senator Fred Harris to talk about his experience. He's one of the last of the surviving members of the original Commission.

**BILL MOYERS:** What was the urgency? I mean here you were just recently elected to the senate from Oklahoma, a basically white state, little town of Walters. What were you thinking? Is this the end of the country? Is this-- what is it?

**FRED HARRIS:** We just didn't know how-- how far this was gonna go. Johnson-- the President, later I went down to talk to him while we were working on the commission. And he said to me, "Have you seen the FBI reports about these riots?" Johnson was like a lot of people who thought maybe there's some conspiracy behind them. And I said conditions are such and the hostilities are such in these central cities that almost any random spark could've set them off .

**BILL MOYERS:** You and all the commission actually went to the streets where the riots were--

**FRED HARRIS:** That's right. We--

**BILL MOYERS:** What did you see? What all these years later, what are the particulars you remember most formidably?

**FRED HARRIS:** We divided up into teams. And my team was John Lindsay and me. John was then the Mayor of New York. You couldn't have had two more different people me from a little ole town in Oklahoma and John Lindsay.

**BILL MOYERS:** For one thing, he was tall, and you were short.

**FRED HARRIS:** That's right. And I remember one-- we went for example, we went to-- Milwaukee. And I spent a good portion of that day in a black barbershop. We found Milwaukee as segregated really, maybe more so, then southern cities. I kept saying to people-- "Do you run into much discrimination here in Milwaukee?" And people didn't know quite how to answer it. It turned out the reason was, that they didn't see any white people. That's how segregated Milwaukee was.

And we found there people, of course, and this was true all over. Black people had come up there looking for jobs.

**BILL MOYERS:** From the South.

**FRED HARRIS:** And the trouble was they found very little opportunity.

**FRED HARRIS:** Jobs is what we heard everywhere. John Lindsey and I were walking down the streets in Cleveland, I believe it was, for example. And we'd see idle young black men on the streets, you know. And these guys get up, and they said, "What we need is jobs baby. Jobs. Get us a job, baby." I remember that so-- and that's what we heard all over.

**BILL MOYERS:** It was the promise of those jobs that had lured so many African-Americans up from the south in the first place. From World War II on, millions of blacks migrated north. Packing into the booming industrial cities of Chicago and Newark, Milwaukee and Detroit. There they earned wages that were the first steps out of poverty for an entire generation.

But twenty years on, even as this great migration kept bringing more and more people into the cities, many of those jobs began dwindling. Huge plants closed down. Moved out to the suburbs and beyond. Many white residents followed suit, leaving the central cities in droves.

By the mid-1960s, many of the biggest inner-cities in America had become chronically segregated. And were drying up economically.

**FRED HARRIS:** There was low family income, high unemployment. Almost criminally inferior schools. No jobs. The jobs had moved out to the suburbs. There was poor transportation. People couldn't get, you had to take two or three buses to get to some of those jobs. And there were jobs, the new jobs that were created, were either requiring a very high level of skills or education, or were just service jobs that were very low pay kind of flipping hamburgers kind of jobs. The people that black people saw as sort of representing society were police officers. And they were nearly all white. And most of them lived outside the central city. And came in during the day to enforce the law. So there was a great deal of hostility.

**BILL MOYERS:** I had a remarkable woman on this broadcast a few months ago, Grace Lee Boggs. She's 91 years old, still lives in, Detroit. She said, "Bill, this was not a riot. This was a rebellion. This rebellion against what you just described as the phalanx of white faces that surrounded the ghetto and kept it segregated." She said it was a rebellion against the loss of jobs. Do you think there's something to that?

**FRED HARRIS:** Well there is, in a way. Although you've gotta be careful to say, you know, it wasn't some organized thing. That is it wasn't a rebellion in the sense that somebody decided to organize it, with a definite ends in mind, goals. It was more spontaneous than that. But what we finally decided on the commission was we couldn't say what caused the violence. Or why the violence would occur, for example, in Watts in '65, but not in '67. What we could do was to describe with particularity, the terrible conditions that existed in these places, where riots had occurred.

We found as I said, no conspiracy. There were one or two on our commission said, "Well, should we actually say that?" Well, isn't that the truth?

**BILL MOYERS:** There was no conspiracy?

**FRED HARRIS:** There was no conspiracy. No organization to this. And they were, "Well, yeah. Well, let's just tell the truth."

**OTTO KERNER: (Illinois Governor, Chairman of Kerner Commission)** There is no indication, no fact, to indicate that any of them were planned. The elements were there. And some fuse, an unpredictable fuse, set them off, but at this point there is still no evidence for any planning for the civil disorders within the cities.

**BILL MOYERS:** In March of 1968, the Report was published. It was brutal in its honesty:

While saying that a growing black militancy may have added fuel to the riots, the commission rejected the idea that there'd been any organization behind the outbreaks.

Instead, the Commission blamed the violence on the devastating poverty and hopelessness endemic in the inner cities of the 1960s.

Among their many findings:

One in five African-Americans lived in "squalor and deprivation in ghetto neighborhoods."

The unemployment rate was double for African-Americans, as compared to whites.

The report described communities that were neglected by their government, wracked with crime, and traumatized by police brutality.

Disproportionate rates of infant mortality were astonishing - African-American children dying at triple the rate of white children.

The statistics weren't new. But the Kerner Commission pushed further, and laid the blame for many of these conditions on white racism: quote "what white Americans have never fully understood -- but what the Negro can never forget -- is that the white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it. White institutions maintain it, and white society condones it."

The report's conclusion — and it's most memorable message — was this: "our nation is moving towards two societies - one white, one black - separate and unequal."

**FRED HARRIS:** We used the word racism. And on the commission, we had two or three people say, "Should we use that word, racism?"

**BILL MOYERS:** Not a word that was thrown around largely by-- government panels in the 1960s.

**FRED HARRIS:** We felt that was very important. I did and I think it was to say it. Because what we know is that oppressed people often come to believe about themselves the same bad stereotypes that the dominant society has. Our saying racism-- I think was very important to a lot of black people who said, "Well, maybe it's not just me. Maybe I'm not-- by myself at fault here. Maybe there's something else going on."

**BILL MOYERS:** I remember that the headlines based on the premature leak of a summary of the report would read-"A Commission Blames Riots on Whites."

**FRED HARRIS:** That's right.

**BILL MOYERS:** White racism. And that inflamed-- whites who didn't want to be blamed.

**FRED HARRIS:** No, that's right. But we felt-- now I think if we had time to background it so that people would have understood it a little better. What we're telling about-- with racism was not - one white person hating one black-- or all black people. We're talking about kind of an institutional racism which existed. And where people live in all white neighborhoods. Send their kids to all white schools. Drive quickly through black section maybe, or on the train, to a job where all their associates are white. And don't see anything odd about it. That was what-

**BILL MOYERS:** The natural order of things.

**FRED HARRIS:** That's right. That's what we were talking about.

**BILL MOYERS:** For civil rights leaders like the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. the Kerner Report confirmed reality

**MARTIN LUTHER KING:** And now we see the surfacing of old prejudices and hostilities that have always been there and they're out in the open — that's very good they're out in the open because you can deal with them much better when they are there to see and when people admit them. My analysis was no more pessimistic or gloomy than the Kerner Commission's report the other day. I do feel that we've got to say in no uncertain terms that racism is alive and on the throne in American society and that we are moving towards two societies... separate and unequal and if something isn't done to stop this in a very determined manner, things can really get worse.

**BILL MOYERS:** The Kerner Commissioners suggested a series of solutions to tackle the problems they'd diagnosed. Everything from better early childhood education to a crackdown on police brutality. They pushed for massive job creation, more affirmative action, and an expansion of the social safety net.

But critics saw the Commission as wrongheaded. They blasted Kerner for blaming everyone in society except for the rioters themselves.

Commission members had hoped to spend six more months explaining their report to the public and lobbying for their recommendations, but in the face of all the criticism, LBJ shelved that idea.

**BILL MOYERS:** Looking back all this time, what did the Kerner Commission get right?

**FRED HARRIS:** I think well virtually everything was right. And I could add onto that this. I think one of the awfulest thing's that came out of the Reagan presidency and later was the feeling that government can't do anything right. And that-- everything it does is wrong. The truth is that virtually everything we tried worked. We just quit trying it. Or we didn't try it hard enough. And that's what we need to get back to. We made progress on virtually every aspect of race and poverty-- for about a decade after the Kerner Commission Report. And then, particularly with the advent of the Reagan Administration, and so forth, that progress stopped. And we began to go backwards. There are consequences from our acts, and when we-- cut out a lot of these-- social

programs, or the money for them, or cut it down-- we don't emphasize jobs and training, and education, and so forth as we had been doing, there are bad consequences from that.

**BILL MOYERS:** The Reagan conservatives were quite critical of the Kerner Commission as being unbalanced and simplistic. They say, for example, that you failed to take into consideration that the close correlation between being born out of wedlock, and growing up without a father, and being poor, that your work over the years actually exempts the poor from being responsible for their own condition.

**FRED HARRIS:** Well, you know, the breakdown in families is just like sort of crime and narcotics and so forth. These are the consequences. They're the handmaidens in the sense of poverty .

**FRED HARRIS:** I said at the time, there are a lot of people who want to-- punish people for being poor. You know, say, "It's your own fault." We want to punish people for being poor. I said, "I used to poor myself. And being poor is punishment enough." I think what you need to do is to help people-- up, give 'em a hand up. And recognize the kind of terrible conditions that they're grown up in.

**BILL MOYERS:** For the last thirty years, Fred Harris has been teaching politics at the University of New Mexico.

**FRED HARRIS:** Power was diffused and one way it was diffused was to break all these committees down into subcommittees...

**BILL MOYERS:** But he never lost his commitment to the cause of the Kerner Commission. When he's not in the classroom, he's part of major, ongoing investigation into the issues of race and poverty today.

Harris sits on the board of the Eisenhower Foundation based in Washington D.C. the Foundation was created to continue the Kerner Commission. Its work is to research and support successful programs in the inner cities.

Every few years, Eisenhower publishes an updated set of findings: a report card of how the country is dealing with the key issues raised by Kerner.

Alan Curtis is President of the Eisenhower Foundation.

**ALAN CURTIS:** The Kerner Commission said, "Look. These problems can be solved. Let's not give up hope. And so, we try to be keepers of the flame of that message. That there is hope. There are solutions. And we remind America every so often, that we still have a long ways to go in fulfilling the prophesies of those commissions and their recommendations.

**BILL MOYERS:** Alan Curtis and Fred Harris have been holding hearings in Washington, Detroit and Newark to prepare a report on the 40th anniversary of Kerner.

**ALAN CURTIS:** We want to listen. We're taking testimony. We would encourage you to discuss today not only the solutions, but how to change political will in America so that we can embrace the priorities of the Kerner Commission and we can begin to fulfill America's promise.

**BILL MOYERS:** In those cities, they heard a striking set of voices.

**KOMOZI WOODARD:** We've gone from an urban crisis in the '60s to an urban catastrophe in the 21st Century. That's what you're looking at when you look at Katrina. That's what you're looking at when you look at gentrification. We are in an urban catastrophe community, we need to be blunt about it because if we use the wrong words, it doesn't wake people up, It puts them to sleep. This is not an ordinary situation and it is a national situation. It is not a Newark situation.

**JUNIUS WILLIAMS:** Big northeastern cities are home to some of the most concentrated poverty in the country, and that's your new split. That's your new division.

**RONALD ANGLIN:** We're seeing lives of quiet desperation that we have cordoned off communities in which we allow crime to exist. We allow lots of bad things to exist, and as long as they don't spill over, that's okay.

**RICHARD CAMMARERI:** I would take issue with one of the premises of the most famous quote in this that we're moving towards two societies. I would respectfully suggest that we never were one society in this country. This country has simply never confronted the issue of race. . Race is, I guess to use a religious term, the original sin of this country.

**HEASTER WHEELER:** I believe 40 years later, today the conditions here in Southeast Michigan are just as ripe for protest, and demonstration, and possibly all those other negative things as they were 40 years later. You need not look too far to see Jena, Louisiana and all of the other challenges.

**MAUREEN TAYLOR:** On my way here, there are people on corners, standing up with signs, say, "Will work for food." But we're in here, talking about what's the problem?

**JOSEPHINE HUYGHE:** You want to know what's going on? It's somebody say, "It's the same old, same old." With the continuation of white flight that started in the '50s has been compounded by the exodus of the middle and upper class blacks as Detroit experienced a 'brain drain'.

**DR. HERBERT SMITHERMAN:** In 1970, the infant mortality rate, that is our babies dying before age of one, was about 65 percent higher in the black community than in the white community. Currently, it's 205 percent higher in the black community than in the white community.

**GEORGE GALSTER:** The City of Detroit constitutes 85 percent black residents, only nine percent white residents. The poverty rate -- white, it's only 5.9 percent, blacks: 24 percent. The median family income -- for whites, over \$65,000, for blacks, only \$37,000. We could go on and

on, but, it's very clear that there are these measurable distinctions between blacks and whites in metro Detroit.

**REV. KEVIN TURMAN:** The young people of my congregation and my community are as industrious as you will find anywhere. They are as innovative and as intelligent as any that you will find anywhere. But unfortunately, they have a number of challenges that have been un-addressed, because the recommendations of the Kerner Commission were ignored or dismissed.

**ROY LEVY WILLIAMS:** The one industry which has flourished is the prison industry. And, yes, it has become an industry. During the last 15 years, this state has been averaging one brand new prison a year.

**GLENDIA MCGADNEY:** We have got to get serious about what's going on and what our government is allowing to happen to us, and how we're losing our rights every single day. And all this money that's being spent for the war, we need to pray about that. Because it should not be going to Iraq. It should be right here in our cities, in our neighborhood.

**DR. HERBERT SMITHERMAN:** When we had 9/11, we were arguing about Social Security reform. Where are we gonna find the money for it? And within 48 hours after 9/11, we found \$40 billion for New York City, a billion dollars an hour. When we want to do something as a country, we do it. This is not about can we do. This is about a will. This is about do we want to do. When you start saying I'm gonna have cuts in Medicare and Medicaid, cuts to housing in urban development, no subsidies to mass transit, eliminate funding for job training, cut school lunch programs for inner city children, eliminate school loan programs for minority students, repeal after-school programs. What I'm saying is this is about public policy. This is about resource implementation.

**KARL GREGORY:** The 1968 Kerner Commission conclusion that racism is deeply embedded in the American society is still true. Racism is still as American as apple pie in this area. The existing huge disparities by race could not exist without racism.

**BILL MOYERS:** The Eisenhower Foundation has now issued their preliminary report and it echoed the testimony they heard across the country:

While noting that certain things have improved - such as the dramatic growth of the black middle class - the foundation nonetheless concludes that "America has, for the most part, failed to meet the Kerner Commission's goals of less poverty, inequality, racial injustice and crime."

Among the troubling facts:

Thirty seven million Americans live in poverty today. But African-Americans are three times as likely to be at the very bottom of the scale, living in what's known as 'deep poverty'.

Median non-white families have just one-fifth the wealth of white families.



And...over the last 20 years, three times as many African-American men go to prison as go to college.

**ALAN CURTIS:** Many people today-- Americans have short memories, of course-- don't realize, for example, that the sentence for a minority person is longer than a sentence for a white person going to prison. Minorities are more likely to get the death sentence than white. The sentences for crack cocaine, used disproportionately by minorities, are longer than the sentences for powdered cocaine, used disproportionately by whites. And so, there is still this endemic, institutional racism in America that people forget about. And I think they need to be reminded about that.

**BILL MOYERS:** The Eisenhower Foundation's full report will be released later this year.

**BILL MOYERS:** Fred, you've been teaching democracy down there at the University of New Mexico for 30 years. Your textbook on democracy is used in universities all over the country. Why can't democracy deal with these persistent, chronic realities that the Kerner Commission described and you here 40 years later are restating?

**FRED HARRIS:** Well I think first of all-- people don't really realize that conditions are so bad for so many people in poverty and-- and for African-Americans, and for Hispanics. I think a lot of people say, well, didn't we do all that? And I think if people knew these conditions and that's what we ought to do on the 40th anniversary of the Kerner Report is to get people to see that these problems of race and poverty are still with us. Also, I think we need to approach this on a basis of that we're all in this together. Somebody said we may not have all come over on the same boat but we're all in the same boat now.

And here's the interesting thing. Every poll that's taken shows that two-thirds of Americans think America's on the wrong footing. They're headed in the wrong direction. And there's overwhelming support for example this: do you think we ought to spend more on-- in prevention-- by putting money in education and training and jobs, instead of police and prisons. Overwhelmingly people say, yes. Do you think that we ought to have a social net-- so-- just to catch people falling out and to give them another chance? Oh, yes, they strongly believe in that. What about healthcare? We got 46 million people without health insurance. And yet overwhelmingly Americans say, yes, I think we ought to have-- healthcare even if-- everybody-- universal healthcare even if it costs us more money. So the public is way ahead of the politicians I think.

And I just think that, as I said, it's in our own interests, and everybody's interests to try to do something about it. We can do it.



## The Kerner Commission and the Media



March 28, 2008

In addition to tracing the 1967 civil disorders to root causes of poverty, inequality in income and education, crime and racial injustice, The Kerner Commission singled out the media for criticism. In the section, "The Communications Media, Ironically, Have Failed to Communicate" the report stated: "We have found a significant imbalance between what actually happened in our cities and what the newspaper, radio and television coverage of the riots told us happened," The Commission criticized the media's use of "scare" headlines, and exaggeration of the scope of the riots. (For example: At the height of the Detroit riot, some news reports of property damage put the figure in excess of \$500 million. Subsequent investigation shows it to be \$40 to \$45 million.)

But the Commission also targeted deeper seated problems in the media:

Our second and fundamental criticism is that the news media have failed to analyze and report adequately on racial problems in the United States and, as a related matter, to meet the Negro's legitimate expectations in journalism. By and large, news organizations have failed to communicate to both their black and white audiences a sense of the problems America faces and the sources of potential solutions.

The Commission had several recommendations for the media:

News organizations must employ enough Negroes in positions of significant responsibility to establish an effective link to Negro actions and ideas and to meet legitimate employment expectations. Tokenism—the hiring of one Negro reporter, or even two or three—is no longer enough.

The news media must publish newspapers and produce programs that recognize the existence and activities of the Negro, both as a Negro and as part of the community. It would be a contribution of inestimable importance to race relations in the United States simply to treat ordinary news about Negroes as news of other groups is now treated.

**James Hiram Malone, GHETTO HEADLINES, National Archive**

Both the Eisenhower Commission's 40th anniversary assessment and the Kerner Plus 40 project undertaken by The Annenberg School for Communication and the Center for Africana Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, and the Institute for Advanced Journalism Studies (IFAJS) at North Carolina A&T State University, found that many problems remain in today's media. Darnell M. Hume noted in "The media and race, 40 years after Kerner" that "forty years after Kerner we continue to confront a reality in which news stories are routinely told 'from the standpoint of a white man's world.'" The Eisenhower Foundation Report found that "locally and nationally, there is little room for covering a host of issues that affect families, neighborhoods and communities.

....Coverage of minority communities, women, rural communities....and just about everyone else who doesn't live in a handful of ZIP codes in places like New York, Los Angeles and Washington DC is badly warped and leads to ill-informed attitudes and misrepresentations in American society."

Both studies trace some of the continuing problems to increasing concentration in the media. As BILL MOYERS JOURNAL has reported, minority media ownership is set to decline further as FCC ownership cap rules are relaxed. In 2007 out of more than 10,000 radio stations nationwide, they own only 635 - or just about six percent. And African-Americans and Latinos own only 33 of the nation's 1350 TV stations.

MayorTV's Andrea Batista Schlesinger noted in our interview with her that much coverage of the urban world still follows the "if it bleeds it leads" formula — like the headlines in James Hiram Malone's painting "Ghetto Headlines," pictured above.

How do you think the media's doing? [Tell us on the Blog.](#)

Published on March 28, 2008.

Stanford Report, October 8, 2008

# Educators say pushback against progress continues racial split in U.S.

BY ADAM GORLICK

Not long after a congressional panel warned the country was splitting into separate societies divided by race, the nation took notice. More money was pumped into urban schools. Opportunities once reserved for white students began opening to their black peers. New teachers were encouraged to take jobs in city schools.

That was 40 years ago, and the Kerner Commission Report helped breed a new political and social will to address issues like poverty, racism and education inequality. But educators and policy experts who gathered last week at Stanford said much of that will has eroded and, with it, many achievements that peaked in the country's schools by the mid-1970s.

"There was reduced segregation, teacher shortages were almost eliminated, urban education funding was as high or higher as other districts and college access was greater," said Linda Darling-Hammond, the Charles E. Ducommun Professor in the School of Education and co-director of the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE).

"Most of these programs were eliminated or sharply reduced in the 1980s," she said. "We've had a pushback."

Darling-Hammond's comments came during a daylong forum sponsored by SCOPE and the nonprofit Eisenhower Foundation to mark the 40th anniversary of the Kerner Commission Report. The report, which was ordered by President Lyndon Johnson in response to the wave of civil disorder and race riots that roiled the country between 1963 and 1967, concluded: "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal."

Steps were taken to sew the racial split. Enforcement of integration policies sparked by the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* became tougher, and the number of white students in schools attended by black students steadily increased between 1970 and 1980.

In 1975, black and Latino students were attending college at the same rate as white students, Darling-Hammond said. That statistic has not been achieved since, she said.

"The policies put in place in the '60s and early '70s had a big effect on approaching equity," she said. "And we have a backsliding since that time."

As a result of President Ronald Reagan's repeal of several education policies in the 1980s, coupled with a 1991 Supreme Court decision that loosened school desegregation obligations, the percentage of white students attending school with black students dropped, said Gary Orfield, a professor at the University of California-Los Angeles Graduate School of Education.

In 1970, about 32 percent of white students were in the same schools as black students. By 2000, the figure was about 31 percent, according to Orfield's research.

"Most racial groups have little to no contact with their white peers," said Prudence Carter, an associate professor of education and co-director of SCOPE.

While America led the world in high school graduation rates in the 1970s, the country recently ranked 13th, in large part because achievement trends for minority students have dropped, Darling-Hammond said.

"White and Asian students are doing as well or better than the international average," she said. "But African Americans and Hispanics are scoring so much lower it brings the entire average down."

She said other countries have had "a very intensive, purposeful set of investments in ensuring that all kids are getting access to education," while America's school policies are "unstable and have not been consistent to move us forward."

The Eisenhower Foundation, which is preparing a 40-year update of the Kerner Commission Report, says the country's educational disparities are linked to funding disparities.

The wealthiest 10 percent of school districts spend nearly 10 times more than the poorest 10 percent of school districts, and there are more blacks than whites at under-funded schools, according to the update's preliminary findings, which give the country a grade of C+ for progress made in racial equality.

"You have an African American running for president," said Alan Curtis, Eisenhower's president and CEO. "You have a great increase in the African American and Latino middle class. That's important progress. But child poverty is higher than it was 40 years ago and inequality has skyrocketed. We're definitely somewhere in the C range, which is not a very good score."

