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## **Racial Divide Widens, Study Says**

*By Alissa J. Rubin*

The twin troubles of poverty and racial division continue to go hand in hand, creating a nation that is deeply divided economically and racially, according to a report by an urban policy group released today in conjunction with the 30th anniversary of the landmark Kerner Commission report.

That commission, which issued its findings at the height of civil rights unrest in 1968, concluded that the United States was "moving toward two societies, one black, one white -- separate and unequal."

The new report by the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation suggests that the prediction has come to pass, in large part because poverty has become entrenched in the nation's inner cities, creating a cycle of crime, lack of education, unemployment and hopelessness.

As a remedy, the foundation, a liberal-leaning urban policy group funded by government and private donations, called on the nation to redirect its resources toward programs that have shown success at educating disadvantaged children, keeping them in school and out of trouble as well as helping their parents gain the education they need to maintain jobs.

The report points to a plethora of such programs that use a combination of government, foundation and private resources to help the very poor gain a foothold in the work force. It recommends an investment of \$56 billion by the government to replicate these efforts.

"We have a robust economy, there's even talk of a budget surplus, so if ever there was a time to address the American dilemma, the time is now," said Lynn A. Curtis, president of the Eisenhower Foundation. He coauthored the report with former Sen. Fred R. Harris (D-Okla.), who served on the Kerner Commission.

"Polls show that typical Americans want to do more for the truly disadvantaged but think that the major obstacle to doing more is 'lack of knowledge,'" Curtis said.

The report concludes that the nation has failed to commit adequate resources to helping the disadvantaged. "We already know what works and what doesn't work, but perhaps we haven't done a good enough job of articulating it," Curtis said.

The foundation's report attributes the deterioration in the urban poor's condition to the legacy of supply-side economics in the 1980s. It also cites increasing hostility to affirmative action and what the report asserts is the failure of several social programs popular in Washington--such as enterprise zones and the Job Training Partnership Act--to truly help poor people.

Conservative theorists are sure to disagree with the report's findings and conclusions. Robert S. Woodson Sr., a black conservative who heads the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, told the Associated Press that the report's authors were "stuck in the '60s" with their analysis and suffer from seeing the world only through a "prism of race."

"Racism and discrimination still exist," Woodson said. "But they aren't the biggest problems facing blacks in America today. The real issue is the growing economic rift within the black community. If we keep banging the drum of racism, we will never find a way to close this economic rift. After all, if racism were the culprit, why haven't all blacks been affected in the same way?"

While it is true that there is a growing black middle class, the new report cites statistics showing that the overall division between rich and poor has widened and that, particularly in urban areas, the poor are disproportionately minorities.

In 1968, roughly 1 in 8 Americans was living in poverty. Today 1 in 7, nearly 14% of the population lives in poverty. Thirty years ago, about 50% of the poor lived in metropolitan areas. Today, 77% do, and the percentage of poor in central city areas, which tend to be minority neighborhoods, also has grown, according to the report's authors.

The result is that despite a national unemployment rate below 5%, the unemployment rate for African Americans is nearly 10%. The employment gap translates into an income gulf between minorities and non-Latino whites: Nearly 30% of African American and Latino families live below the poverty line, three times the rate for non-Latino whites. Similarly, the median family income for Latinos and African Americans is about 55% that of their non-Latino white counterparts.

The report identifies programs that offer hope of loosening poverty's grip. It points to the successes of national nonprofit organizations such as Big

Brothers/Big Sisters, the Boys and Girls Clubs and the Quantum Opportunities Program, which is funded by the Ford Foundation and helps high school youth.

Also winning praise are programs such as the New Community Corp. in Newark, N.J., where a Catholic priest led the development of a housing project, day care center and food service for the poor.

It has been so successful that the corporation was awarded a \$7-million loan from the Prudential Foundation to establish a credit union and build a Pathmark supermarket, one of just two full-sized supermarkets in Newark.

The report highlights the success of the Head Start program and urges the country to back full funding for the preschool program so that all eligible children can participate.

Now, just one-third of all eligible children are enrolled.