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## **Building Two-Way Streets in the Cities**

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There's a slim chance that *deja vu* - to stand Yogi Berra's line on its head - won't happen all over again in the nation's inner cities. If the Clinton Administration and its allies get their way, the cycle of urban violence, public remorse and private recrimination over federal inaction that has been repeated again and again for most of this century may finally be broken.

To mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the March 1, 1968, report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation has issued a study that excoriates the federal government for its lack of response to last April's riots in Los Angeles. The foundation, which was set up to carry on the work of the Kerner Commission, calls for a "pragmatic" \$30 billion federal investment "that begins by reinventing government for the truly disadvantaged," in the words of Lynn A. Curtis, its president, who also wrote the 1968 report.

Such a demand for a huge infusion of federal aid to help the inner-city poor certainly isn't new; in fact, it's a predictable part of the old cycle. But some things are different, and they hold out a small promise for change.

The Eisenhower Foundation report lists dozens of programs that have made a big difference to children, youth and poor neighborhoods in the most distressed cities around the nation. These programs are, for the most part, local initiatives that have been designed to meet a community's distinctive needs. Most of them are operated by private, nonprofit organizations. They get their money from a variety of sources, including the federal government. But they are not federal programs.

Herein lies an irony. The biggest critics of the Reagan-Bush era do not suggest a return to either the New Deal or the Great Society approach of massive federal programs. Indeed, they advocate the kind of grass-roots, public-private ventures that were pioneered during the Reagan and Bush Administrations. They seek from the Clinton Administration what they didn't get from either Reagan or Bush: cooperation, friendliness ("partnership" is a key word these days) and an end to hostilities, along with a little money.

Which brings up the mayors and county officials and the dramatic reversal in the attitude of the local government groups toward the White House.

The U.S. Conference of Mayors, the National League - of Cities and the National Association of Counties are all enthusiastically - jubilantly, even - supporting President Clinton's economic plan even though cities and counties would have to sustain some cuts in federal aid.

The mayors and other local officials are responding, in part, to the recognition that the federal budget deficit needs to be reduced. But that doesn't account for the new spring in their steps or ring in their sound bites as they troop into Washington for their annual winter meetings to lobby Congress and the President. For the first time in at least 12 years, these local officials feel that they are in friendly territory, that their needs are understood and their situations appreciated by those in control. Indeed, the few grumbles that can be heard are about federal mandates, not money.

Clinton's economic plan and support for such direct federal programs as Head Start, of course, enter into the calculations of both the local officers and nonprofit activist organizations.

The Eisenhower Foundation report describes how, in the wake of the riots in the 1960s, the federal government ignored the plight of inner-city neighborhoods and forced communities to set up their own programs. During that period, neighborhood youth programs sprang up around the country - the Argus Community in the Bronx, the House of Umoja in Philadelphia and the Dorchester Youth Collaborative in Boston, for example - to offer young people in the nation's ghettos safe havens in which to play sports, avoid drugs and, most important, talk to adults who cared about them.

Similarly, the local government groups complain about federal disinvestment in the cities during the Reagan and Bush Administration, which forced community development corporations and other local nonprofits to take up the slack.

But perhaps these critics of Reagan and Bush should, instead, thank them for providing an environment in which real innovation could take place. The innovations have worked, if only on a small scale. That's why the Eisenhower Foundation and officials of local governments want federal aid to enlarge and spread these kinds of programs to other neighborhoods and other cities. They don't want the federal government to run the programs - or even pick up the entire tab.

The difference between the Reagan-Bush approach to cities and what local officials say they believe will be the Clinton tack is profound.

Consider two federal housing programs: HOPE and HOME. HOPE, the pride and joy of Jack F. Kemp, the Housing and Urban Development

(HUD) Secretary in the Bush Administration, was the plan to sell off public housing to tenants. It was an example of Kemp's total faith in free markets and complete hostility to government projects. It didn't work.

HOME, which Congress adopted over Kemp's opposition, is a block grant program that's designed to foster public-private cooperation in the rehabilitation of housing and of neighborhoods. Deals put together by cities, community development corporations and local banks and businesses are central to its operation. Nearly everyone who's worked with local housing programs says that HOME is just what the doctor ordered. But the program has been hobbled by some onerous regulations, and HUD Secretary Henry G. Cisneros says that he is working on streamlining the rules to get more money to the cities.

The mayors have given Clinton a real honeymoon. The Eisenhower Foundation is a lot more skeptical, although Curtis allowed that "the Clinton Administration has the vision needed to implement what works."

Now comes the hard part for both sides. Clinton has to get his economic plan through Congress more or less intact. Then, the mayors and the nonprofit groups have to live up to their side of the bargain and actually get the programs out on the street.