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A long way to go

In his March 8 column ["Two nations yet to materialize"] on the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation's 30-year update of the 1968 Kerner Riot Commission, Carl Rowan says he "cannot subscribe to the argument that things have gone downhill over three decades to the point that we have established an American separatism that approaches apartheid."

We would not disagree although the rate of incarceration of African-American men today is four times higher than for black men in pre-Mandela, apartheid South Africa.

In our report we say that there have been some real improvements. The African-American middle class has expanded. High school completion rates for African Americans have improved. But we document now, at the same time, that things have gotten worse for the minorities left behind by the disinvestment from job training and job creation in the 1980s and the simultaneous trend to make prison building our national housing policy for the poor.

Rowan overlooks our main point: If the nation reduces by only a fraction the \$100 billion-plus taxpayers now pay for affirmative action for the rich and for corporate welfare, we could finance a full employment program for the truly disadvantaged in our inner cities and reform our urban public education system.

Such reform can be based on replicating scientifically proven models of success like the South Bronx Argus Community's job training and placement model, the South Shore Bank's model for community development banking to help generate jobs, boys and girls club-type safe havens for children during high-crime hours, the Ford Foundation's high school dropout prevention program, and the decentralized School Development Plan of the distinguished African-American psychiatrist and activist, James P. Comer, at Yale. (The Comer plan has been implemented well in Chicago by Youth Guidance, a well-regarded nonprofit organization.)

Lynn A. Curtis, president
Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation,
Washington, D.C.

