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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Kerner Update Used Scientific Evidence

The excellent article by Domenica Marchetti on the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation's 30-year update of the report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, commonly known as the Kerner Riot Commission ("Charities Must Work to Build on Successes in Fight Against Poverty, Report Says," March 12), also illustrates the media tactics of naysayers. The Kerner Commission update, titled "The Millennium Breach," is careful to base its proposed non-profit models for replication on successes, like the Ford Foundation's Quantum Opportunities Program, that have been carefully evaluated and replicated. Yet the article quotes a naysayer as alleging just the opposite -- that we present no scientific evidence. A fairly high proportion of the readers of The Chronicle will actually read the report and so see the scientific evidence. But when such a criticism is made in, say, an ordinary city newspaper, most readers will not be able or willing to take the time to validate such purposeful disinformation. That is precisely one way in which naysayers have tried to convince Americans that little works in the way of non-profit investments.

The same naysayer criticizes our recommendation that grassroots non-profits should receive training in media and communications skills -- as presently is being done in the Eisenhower Foundation's media-training school for grassroots non-profit executive directors -- so that they can better raise funds and communicate what works. The criticism alleges that we made this recommendation instead of advocating training in how to run grassroots organizations. However, anyone who actually reads the Kerner Commission update will see that our recommendation really is for more training in non-profit institutional capacity building -- including management, financial management, staff development, board development, evaluation, replication, fund raising, media, and communications.

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