

# Detroit Free Press

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## Race issues worse off than '60s, panel told

BY JOHN WISELY, Free Press Staff Writer

Herbert Harris can remember walking out of Detroit's Eastern High School in 1968, demanding that it be renamed for slain civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The students got that wish, but many other dreams of that era remain unfulfilled, Harris said.

"We have moved as individuals, but collectively, we're worse off than we were," said Harris, 55, who still lives in Detroit.

Harris was one of several Detroiters to testify Saturday at a forum at Wayne State University organized by the reconstituted Kerner Riot Commission, a federal panel that examined the urban unrest of the 1960s, including Detroit's 1967 riot.

The panel was organized by the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation, a private-sector organization, to update the findings of the commission. In 1968, the commission report concluded that the nation was headed toward two societies -- one black and one white, separate and unequal.

In addition to listening to Detroiters and conducting panel discussions on race and poverty, the group also planned to walk through Detroit neighborhoods affected by 1960s unrest. About 200 people attended the hearing.

Later, the panel will visit other urban centers studied 40 years ago, including Newark, N.J., New Orleans, Miami, Los Angeles and Washington. New Orleans was added because of the race and poverty issues following Hurricane Katrina.

George Galster, a Wayne State urban affairs professor, painted a grim picture of race relations in metro Detroit, home of what he called the most segregated housing and

schooling in America. "Indeed, the predictions of the Kerner Commission have come true," Galster said.

Former Oklahoma Sen. Fred Harris, who served on the original Kerner Riot Commission, said much progress was made in the first 10 years after the report, but that progress has been undone more recently. The issues haven't changed.

"It's basically what we were talking about before: jobs, training, early education," Harris said.

Dinah Gordon, 22, of Detroit has studied the history of the 1960s: "The same elements that were present then are still in existence. All it takes is one spark, and you'll see it."

But there are signs of progress, said Grace Lee Boggs, 93.

"All over Detroit, there is a hum of activity at the grassroots level," she said.