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## **Kerner Commission's Separate And Unequal' Societies Exist Today: Report**

Thirty years ago the noted Kerner Commission report said the nation was "moving toward two societies, one Black, one White separate and unequal," and that's exactly what has happened, says a new report.

The new report, "The Millennium Breach," released on the 30th anniversary of the Kerner report, says the economic and racial divide in the United States not only has materialized, it's getting wider.

"The Kerner Commission's prophecy has largely come to pass," the report states.

The new report was presented by the Eisenhower Foundation to coincide with the 30th anniversary of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders' release of the Kerner Commission report, named after its chairman, then-Illinois Gov. Otto Kerner.

The commission was established by President Lyndon B. Johnson to probe the causes of the rioting in the nation's major cities in the 1960s and study race relations in the U.S.

"Let your search be free," President Johnson told the commission. "As best you can, find the truth, the whole truth and express it in your report."

"The rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer and minorities are suffering disproportionately," say the new report's co-authors, Lynn A. Curtis, president of the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation, which sponsored the report, and former U.S. Senator Fred R. Harris (D-OK), who served on the original Kerner panel 30 years ago.

"The private market has failed the inner city. The prison system is a symbol of discrimination. A class and racial breach is widening again as we begin the new millennium," the report's authors note.

"While leaders and pundits talk of full employment,' inner city unemployment is at crisis levels," the authors point out.

The report found that while the White economy booms, for the first time in the 20th century, most adults in many inner cities are not working in a typical week.

The report also found that 40 percent of minority children attend schools in urban areas, where more than half of the students are poor and fail to reach even the "basic" level on national achievement tests.

"Early-year poverty is closely associated with the diminution of a children's achievement and cognitive and verbal skills and substantially reduces the chances the child will finish high school," the report says.

During the 1980s, the report found child poverty increased by over 20 percent, with racial minorities suffering disproportionately. Today, the child poverty rate in the U.S. is four times the average of Western European countries.

The nation's housing policy for poor and minorities has become prison building. Over the 1980s and early 1990s the nation tripled the number of prison cells while at the same time reduced housing appropriations for the poor by over 80 percent. Only 1 in 4 eligible poor families now can get housing, the report says.

Other findings include that 1 of every 3 young Black men was in prison, on probation or on parole by the late 1990s and states now spend more per year on prison than on higher education, while 10 years ago spending priorities were just the opposite. Also, prisons disproportionately incarcerate minorities, but prison building has become a growth industry for Whites in rural areas.

"People need to become aware that things are getting worse again," says Harris.

"Race and poverty are intertwined, and each makes the other worse," he said in *The Washington Post*, explaining that the nation's poverty level has increased in the last 30 years and the nation's poor are still disproportionately Black and Hispanic.

While the Black middle class and Black businesses have grown and black elected officials have increased, all helped by affirmative action programs and civil rights laws, racial inequalities are becoming more rooted in the country, the report insists.

Harris also told the *Post*, "But the progress we've made on race and poverty really stopped toward the end of the 1970s. Then, we began in many ways to go backward."

