

U.S. Has Failed To Learn From Riots, Study Says

25 years ago, a landmark report warned of separate unequal societies. It was ignored, a new study says

By Sonya Ross, Associated Press

WASHINGTON -- Despite a history of urban riots, the United States has never learned how to invest in inner cities and stop the cyclical upheaval, according to a new study.

Last spring's riots in Los Angeles underscored the lack of a serious federal effort to erase the same type of racial and economic discrimination blamed for riots as far back as 1919, says the report, which was released yesterday by the private Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation to coincide with the 25 anniversary of the Kerner Commission's report.

In 1968, the Kerner report concluded that the United States was moving toward two societies, one black, one white separate and unequal.

The new report says, We can reflect, again, on the same moving picture now the April 1992 riots in South Central Los Angeles. Congress and the White House misunderstood the problem. They then constructed a solution that flew in the face of what really did work.

After the Los Angeles riots, Congress passed a \$1.3 billion package including loans to small businesses and \$500 million for summer jobs. A longer-term plan, focusing on urban-enterprise zones and drug-enforcement efforts, was vetoed by President George Bush.

The contents of the vetoed bill raised grave doubts about whether the gridlocked American federal political process would or could ever enact informed solutions, the report says.

Lynn A. Curtis, author of the Eisenhower report, said the federal government should focus on high-tech job training, affordable housing and community development banks that can finance inner-city projects.

Our new policy . . . must be framed by words like investment, replication, reinvention, leadership, responsibility and sacrifice, Curtis said.

Federal efforts have been insufficient and too rigid, and do not allow for local, neighborhood-based, one-stop shopping for coordinated services, the report says.

The study also urges:

- Focusing on drug treatment and prevention, rather than interdiction.
- Reorganizing the Job Training Partnership Act to orient it toward the needs of inner-city youth.
- Turning responsibility for building low-income housing over to nonprofit organizations, rather than for-profit developers.
- Investing \$15 billion in inner-city infrastructure, for 10 years.

The Kerner panel, also known as the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, was convened by President Lyndon B. Johnson to find what caused riots in Detroit, Baltimore, Washington and Newark, N.J., in the late 1960s.

On March 1, 1968, the commission issued a report identifying a cycle of poverty and despair that locked many inner-city blacks out of mainstream society.