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Supply-Side Policies of the 1980s Opened up a Class Breach

In his March 13 commentary, "Kerner forecast revisited," Clarence Page says "The *Millennium Breach*," a 30-year update of the Kerner Riot Commission's conclusions, was greeted by a "huge, collective yawn." In fact, the report was featured on ABC, BBC, CBS, CNN, NBC "Today," NPR, the PBS' "NewsHour With Jim Lehrer," hundreds of radio programs and almost every major newspaper in the nation.

It is not just that Mr. Page lied. It is that he also chose to miss our main point: If we reduce by only a fraction the \$100 billion-plus that taxpayers pay for affirmative action for the rich and for corporate welfare, we could finance both a full employment program for the truly disadvantaged in our inner cities and the reform of our urban public education system.

Such reform could be based on replicating scientifically proven models of success - such as the South Bronx Argus Community's job training and placement model, the Ford Foundation's Quantum Opportunities high school dropout prevention program and the decentralized School Development Plan of the distinguished black psychiatrist and activist, Yale professor James P. Comer.

In his March 16 commentary, "Building a better income bridge," Joseph Perkins also chooses to miss this point, perhaps because it would offend his corporate bosses.

Messrs. Page and Perkins conveniently forget to share with the reader how the 1980s policy of tax breaks for the rich and prison building for the poor has failed, how we have carefully accumulated the expertise to replicate what does work (such as havens after school for youth and community-based banking to reinvest in the inner city) and how we need a grass-roots communicating-what-works movement to let taxpayers know that common-sense solutions are at hand.

What we also need is the political will to act. That must be forged through a new alliance among the working class, truly disadvantaged and anxious middle class.

While making these points, "The *Millennium Breach*" observes that, since the Kerner Commission, the African-American middle class has expanded. But it also observes that things have gotten worse for minorities left behind in the 1980s. We conclude that, in terms of income, wages and wealth, a class *breach* was opened by the rich against the rest of us as a result of supply-side policies of the 1980s.

Mr. Page and Mr. Perkins talk about the new importance of class differences. We agree. But we do not forget the unconscionable racial bias of the criminal justice system (the rate of incarceration of African-American males today is four times higher than for blacks in pre-Mandela, apartheid South Africa), the racial glass ceiling on Wall Street and in most corporations, the re-segregation of our schools and neighborhoods, and the racial minorities locked in the inner city poorhouse.

LYNN A. CURTIS

President

Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation Washington

* Mr. Curtis is co-author of "The *Millennium Breach*."