America Fifty Years After the Kerner Commission Report

Education and the Path to One Nation, Indivisible

LEARNING POLICY INSTITUTE
#KernerAt50
The Context

1963 – Birmingham march & church bombing; March on Washington; JFK assassinated

1964 – Riots in cities in response to discrimination & police violence; Civil Rights Act passed

1965 – Selma & Montgomery marches; police violence; Voting Rights Act; Malcolm X assassinated

1966 – Civil rights actions; anti-Vietnam War activism

1967 – Riots sparked by police violence

1968 – Fair Housing Act; Kerner Commission Report released; MLK and Robert Kennedy assassinated
What Followed?

- **War on Poverty / Great Society Programs:**
  - Employment and training programs
  - Housing and urban renewal investments
  - Health and social services, welfare supports
  - Summer school and jobs for youth

- **Education Investments**
  - Elementary & Secondary Education Act
  - Education for All Handicapped Children Act
  - Desegregation Assistance Act & magnet schools
  - Teacher corps, Loan forgiveness for teachers
  - Higher education scholarships (Pell and others)
  - School finance reforms
Average Reading Scale Scores on the Long-Term Trend National Assessment of Educational Progress for 13-Year-Olds, by Race/Ethnicity, Selected Years, 1971–2012

Average Mathematics Scale Scores on the Long-Term Trend National Assessment of Educational Progress for 17-Year-Olds, by Race/Ethnicity, Selected Years, 1973–2012

During the 1980s:

- Federal aid cut from 12% to 6% of school spending
- Programs aimed at poor communities cut
- Desegregation assistance ended
- Federal aid to states for health, mental health, housing also cut
- States cut education budgets to deal with shifting responsibilities
% of Children in Poverty

- % below poverty line
- % below 50% of poverty line

https://www.childtrends.org/indicators/children-in-poverty/
Proportion of Black Students Attending Majority White Schools

Where are We Now?

- Segregation has increased
- Childhood poverty has increased by 50%
- Poverty is more concentrated in communities and schools
- Income and wealth disparities have grown
- Gaps in achievement and attainment have grown
Proportions of Black and Latino Students in Schools by Poverty Concentration

Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate for Public High School Students by Race/Ethnicity, 2014–15

Note: The adjusted cohort graduation rate is the percentage of public high school freshmen who graduate with a regular diploma within 4 years of starting 9th grade.

Proportion of Population 25 Years and Older with 4 or More Years of College, 1940–2015

The Costs of Inequality

If Hispanic and African American student performance grew to be comparable to white performance and remained there over the next 80 years, the ... impact would be staggering—adding some $50 trillion (in present value terms) to our economy—more than three times the size of our current GDP. (This) represents the income that we forgo by not ensuring equity for all of our students.”

Tackling the Agenda that Matters Most

"On some positions, Cowardice asks the question, 'Is it safe?'
Expediency asks the question, 'Is it politic?'
And Vanity comes along and asks the question, 'Is it popular?'
But Conscience asks the question 'Is it right?'
And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must do it because Conscience tells him it is right."

—Martin Luther King, 1968
RACIAL CRISIS
50 YEARS LATER

Gary Orfield, Civil Rights Project

Self perpetuating inequality in a vacuum of civil rights & social policy
MASSIVE RACIAL CHANGE IN SCHOOLS

- In 1970, 79% Whites, 15% Blacks, 5% Hispanics, .5% Asians, 1% Indians
  A BLACK-WHITE SOCIETY

- In 2013, 50% Whites, 15% Blacks, 25% Hispanics, 5% Asians, 1% Indians
  A FOUR RACE SOCIETY
DESEGREGATION ABANDONED

INTENSE DOUBLE SEGREGATION OF BLACKS AND LATINOS BY RACE & CLASS

ALL PROGRESS OF LAST HALF CENTURY LOST AFTER SERIES OF NEGATIVE SUPREME COURT DECISIONS

DIRECTLY LINKED TOUNEQUAL OPPORTUNITIES & OUTCOMES

STUDENTS OF COLOR NOT PREPARED FAIRLY FOR COLLEGE
LARGE GAP IN COLLEGE COMPLETION

Whites more likely than blacks to have college degree

% of U.S. adults ages 25 and older who have at least a bachelor's degree

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<th>Whites</th>
<th>Blacks</th>
<th>Hispanics</th>
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Note: Whites, blacks and Asians include only those who reported a single race. Native Americans and mixed-race groups not shown. Data for whites, blacks and Asians from 1971 to 2015 include only non-Hispanics. Data for whites and blacks prior to 1971 include non-Hispanics. Data for Hispanics not available prior to 1971. Hispanics are of any race. Data for Asians not available prior to 1988. Asians include Pacific Islanders. Prior to 1992 those who completed at least 16 years of school are classified as having a bachelor's degree.


"On Views of Race and Inequality, Blacks and Whites are Worlds Apart" PEW RESEARCH CENTER
Large job gaps by education level.

- Bachelor’s or higher degree
- Some college, no bachelor’s degree
- High school completion
- Less than high school completion
LIFETIME PROBABILITY OF MALE PRISONMENT BY RACE

- Blacks  1 in 3
- Latinos  1 in 6
- Whites   1 in 17
- Impacts on life, families, & communities

Source: Sentencing Project
The actual fraction of men who have jobs is lower, after accounting for mass incarceration

Data for male HS dropouts aged 20-34

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whites</td>
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<td>Black men</td>
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Source: Census CPS and ACS
WAPO.ST/WONKBLOG
MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD WEALTH BY RACE

Racial Wealth Inequality Is Rampant In The U.S.
Median household wealth by race/ethnicity in the United States (1983–2024)

Source: Prosperity Now & Institute For Policy Studies
MASSIVE HOMEOWNERSHIP GAP
BY RACE

Figure 2: Homeownership Rates by Race and Ethnicity
THE VICIOUS CYCLE

- Low education & job discrimination means less employment, lower wages
- Low wages and housing discrimination means weaker neighborhoods and schools, more exposure to crime
- Greatly increased chance of incarceration & end of education
- Weaker schools mean lower success in college
- Less ability to buy homes in areas with good schools and value increase means far less wealth
- Less wealth and discrimination mean that children will face the same syndrome

[All of these threats are multiplied for families that are undocumented]
THE NEXT CIVIL RIGHTS REVOLUTION

- Must be an attack on poverty as well as racial inequality & prejudice
- Provide access to the good public schools of the region
- Expanded college access, funding, and support
- Fair access to housing and neighborhoods
- Need race-based remedies for race-based inequalities & discrimination
- End massive incarceration and re-integrate former prisoners
- End obstacles to voting
- Solution to immigration crisis for long-term residents
- Commitment to racial justice and training in all institutions
50 years after Kerner: Where are we now?

Patricia Gándara
Civil Rights Project, UCLA
February 28, 2018
US has changed radically since Kerner, but not in ways we had expected

- When **Kerner Report** released, immigration was at an **historic low**: less than 5% of population, fewer than 10M, and **mostly European**: US was Black & White

- Today, 13.5% of the population are immigrants; about 44 million, but now US is **multiracial**.

- As a percentage, still lower than peak in 1890 (14.8%)

- Mexicans are 26% of immigrants; more than 3X as many came from India and China in 2016 as Mexico;

- And the South is once again a focus of racial challenges
Children of immigrants

- One in four (25%) school age children in the US is a child of immigrants (at least 1 parent)
- But 90% of “immigrant children” are born in the US; they’re OUR kids!
- More than half of US-born immigrant children live at or near poverty in often triply segregated conditions
- 40% of immigrant children live in families in which neither parent is a citizen (may be legal, but can’t vote)
- Fastest growth is in the South and N & S Dakota!
Immigrant students & families are under siege from ICE

- We have surveyed more than 730 schools in 12 states:
- Random raids and deportations of parents of citizen children have students terrorized,
- 90% of administrators surveyed reported they had observed behavioral or emotional problems in immigrant students; 25% said this was extensive, especially in the South – Republican stronghold with more pro-Trump, anti-immigrant harassment
- “Several students have arrived at school crying, withdrawn and refusing to eat lunch because they have witnessed deportation of a family member. Some students show anxiety symptoms ... All of this impacts their ability to focus and complete work, which further affects them academically.” [Tennessee counselor]
Kids losing ground in school

- 70% of administrators reported academic decline among their immigrant students; 1 in 6 counselors reported this to be “extensive.”

- Many teachers report excellent college-bound students giving up on school because they doubt their future in the US.

- “They are not thinking about college, or the test next week, or what is being taught in the classroom today. They are thinking about their family and whether they will still be a family; whether their family will remain intact.” [Tennessee Administrator]
Framed as a “problem,” these immigrant students are primed to be excellent learners

- Defined by what they don’t have (EL), they possess 5 ASSETS that give them a special learning advantage
  - Resilience (persistence)
  - Collaborative orientation to learning
  - Hopefulness (optimism; “American Dream”)
  - Bilingualism (confers real cognitive benefits)
  - Multi-cultural (ability to see things from multiple perspectives—innovation & creativity)

We are squandering a huge asset!