

**Call for papers for an issue on:  
The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Kerner Commission Report**

**Co-Edited by**

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The year 2018 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Kerner Commission Report the work on the The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. The Commission was established by President Lyndon Johnson in 1967 in the wake of successive summers of racial violence in America. Recent episodes of civil disorder and violent protests in American cities related to police violence and elections suggest comparisons with the 1960's protests.

The editors invite abstracts of original empirical research articles by both established and emerging scholars on the five major topic areas in the Kerner Commission report: **education, employment, housing, police-community relations, and welfare**. Proposed articles must address each of the following questions in one of the topic areas:

- How far have we come?
- What worked and what did not work?
- What are the implications for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

Papers will provide comprehensive reviews of what we know while reporting original empirical research findings about progress made, successes and failures, and implications for the future.

**Background**

The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (often referred to as the Kerner Commission in deference to its chairman, Otto Kerner) was established by President Lyndon Johnson in 1967, after four summers of urban racial disorders and violence in several major cities. The President tasked the commission with three central questions: What happened? Why did it happen? What can be done to prevent it from happening again?

After conducting a comprehensive investigation, visiting cities affected by riots, and consulting with scores of experts and witnesses, the Kerner Commission issued its report on February 29, 1968. The Kerner Report attributed the causes of urban violence to white racism, and the neglect

and isolation it produced for African Americans. The basic conclusion of the report was, “Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal.”

The Kerner Report outlined core recommendations for a National Plan of Action with a goal of moving towards “a single society and a single American identity.” It called for the substantial investment of federal funds to assist African-American communities and prevent further racial polarization and violence. The main recommendations included those in the areas of education, employment, housing, police-community relations, and welfare. President Johnson never accepted or acted upon the findings of the Report. Shortly after it was released, the nation was shaken by the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and riots and violence broke out in many cities across the country.

### **RSF: The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Kerner Commission Report**

Given the renewed national attention to the problems of race relations in the United States, the upcoming 50th anniversary of the Kerner Commission Report provides an opportunity to revisit the report, its findings, and recommendations in light of contemporary political realities, social structures, and policy debates. Original empirical research papers are invited in five substantive areas covered in the final report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders and must directly address the questions of:

- How far have we come?
- What worked and what did not work?
- What are the implications for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

Preference will be given to papers that address one or more of these questions using original empirical research.

All papers must demonstrate a clear connection between the core themes and specific recommendations of the Kerner Commission Report. Preference will be given to papers that provide a direct linkage to the success or failures of remedies proposed in the report.

#### **Education**

In the 1960s, the U.S. educational system was largely segregated, with blacks having far fewer educational opportunities than whites. Today, public education is far more diverse, high school completion rates are higher, and college attendance rates have soared. But many racial disparities persist, particularly among minority youth in urban areas. Proposals in this area should detail what worked, what did not work and what political and policy strategies hold promise moving forward.

#### **Employment**

Job markets, wages, and earnings all indicate significant racial differentials. Labor market outcomes consistently demonstrate racial inequities in earnings. And, those with criminal

records, often have very few labor market options. Proposals in this area should consider trends in racial and ethnic disparities in employment, unemployment, wages and occupations over the last fifty years. Papers must detail what if any of the proposals of the Kerner Commission were adopted in this area and summarize the evidence regarding the success or failure of these policies. Papers should also highlight innovative practices that have demonstrated success in reducing racial disparities in labor markets.

## **Housing**

Housing policies have a significant impact on asset accumulation and economic well-being. The Kerner Commission report highlighted specific public policy areas where changes were needed to reduce segregation and discrimination. Notable public policies on home ownership, rental housing and public housing, and lending all emerged after the Kerner Commission report. Proposals in this area should identify particular policies advanced by the report, discuss whether these policies worked or did not work, and propose viable, evidence-based policy solutions to housing disparities.

## **Police-community relations**

A core component of the Kerner Commission report focused on racial violence and its relationship to police behavior. Recent reports from the U.S. Department of Justice confirm significant areas of concern remain regarding the relationship between law enforcement and the African-American community. Papers in this area must detail what policies were implemented as a result of the report, what were the impacts of these policies, and what work remains given the evidence from the past fifty years. What approaches suggest positive outcomes?

## **Welfare**

Anti-poverty measures were a primary focus of the War on Poverty. However, welfare policy has been largely shaped by conceptualizations of the deserving vs. the undeserving poor. Since the Kerner Commission report, what has been the role of politics and public policy in approaches to welfare policy? What approaches hold promise and demonstrate success?

## **Other topics**

In addition to the five topic areas included in the Kerner Commission report, the editors also may consider papers on other relevant topics associated with the findings of the Kerner Commission report. Examples include:

- A comprehensive analysis of civil disorder as a form of politics and its impacts on engaging marginalized populations in political activism
- New areas of inequality that the Kerner commission may not have contemplated or that may not be all that new but which were overlooked
- Changes in the composition and location of the African American population and implications of these shifts for understanding the problems investigated by the Kerner Commission

- Changes in the racial and ethnic make-up of the United States and consequences for the success or failure of proposals offered by the Kerner Commission
- The role of the courts, congress, administrative action and/or public opinion in helping us understand why policies in some areas recommended by the Kerner Commission Report were successful and others were not; assessment of the use and limits of legislation and judicial action in the reform efforts;
- Analysis of recent episodes of civil disobedience including the role of such groups as Black Lives Matters, backlash, and white resentment in electoral politics
- Mass incarceration and its effects on removing from the population large numbers of marginalized persons from civic engagement

The co-editors will contribute an introductory chapter that provides context on the Kerner Commission and its importance and relevancy today as well as recurring themes across policy domains, and the structural inequalities that impede progress. They will also discuss innovative strategies that offer significant promise.

### **Anticipated Timeline**

Prospective contributors should submit a current CV and an abstract of their study (up to two pages in length, single spaced), plus up to two pages of supporting material (e.g., tables, figures, pictures, etc.) All abstract submissions are due no later than **noon EST on March 30, 2017** to:

**<http://rsfjournal.onlineapplicationportal.com>**

All submissions must be original works that have not been published previously in part or in full. Only abstracts submitted through the portal above will be considered. All questions regarding this issue should be directed to Suzanne Nichols, Director of Publications, at [journal@rsage.org](mailto:journal@rsage.org) and not to the email addresses of the editors of the issue.

A conference will take place at RSF in New York City on **October 6, 2017**, with a dinner for participants on the 5th. The selected contributors will gather for a one-day workshop to present draft papers (**due on September 8, 2017, a month prior to the conference**) and receive feedback from the other contributors and editors. Travel costs, food, and lodging will be covered by the foundation. Papers will be circulated before the conference. After the conference, the authors will submit their revised drafts. The papers will then be sent out to three additional scholars for formal peer review. Having received feedback from reviewers and the RSF board, authors will revise their papers.

The issue will be published in conjunction with a national conference commemorating the report's anniversary in fall of 2018. Authors are expected to present their final papers at this conference; travel costs, food and lodging will also be covered for paper presenters. Papers will be published open access on the RSF website as well as in several digital repositories, including JSTOR and UPCC/Muse.