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FOR RELEASE

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WASHINGTON, D.C.----- The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights recommended today that the Federal Government give "immediate and urgent consideration" to new legislation which would result in the elimination of racial isolation from the public schools of the Nation.

Racial Isolation in the Public Schools, the Commission study done at the request of President Johnson, found that Negro children suffer serious harm when they are educated in racially segregated schools, whatever the source of that segregation. William L. Taylor, Staff Director of the Commission, announced the results of the study and the Agency's recommendations.

The Commission --- composed of two college presidents, a newspaper editor, an attorney, a college professor and a law school dean --- concluded unanimously that:

"Negro children who attend predominantly Negro schools do not achieve as well as other children, Negro and white. Their aspirations are more restricted than those of other children and they do not have as much confidence that they can influence their own futures. When they become adults, they are less likely to participate in the mainstream of American society."

In carrying out its study, the Commission collected and analyzed existing data, conducted new research and held public hearings in which it heard testimony from school officials, teachers, parents and community leaders.

The Commission examined a number of factors which influence the achievement and attitudes of students, including the quality of teaching and the social and economic composition of their schools. It confirmed the major finding of the Equality of Educational Opportunity survey by the U.S. Office of Education that the social class composition of schools has an important effect on student achievement and attitudes. "The social class of a student's classmates --- as measured by the economic circumstances and educational background of their families -- also strongly influences his achievement and attitudes," reported the Commission. "Regardless of his own family background, an individual student achieves better in schools where most of his fellow students are from advantaged backgrounds than in schools where most of his fellow students are from disadvantaged backgrounds."

While finding that these factors are important, the Commission learned that even when they are taken into account there were significant differences in the performance and attitudes of Negro students who attended majority-Negro schools when they were compared with Negro students in majority-white schools. Schools with majority-Negro enrollments often are regarded and treated by the community as segregated and inferior schools, the Commission reported, and students, teachers, and administrative staff frequently share the community's view. "This stigma affects the achievement and attitudes of Negro students," the report said.



Since comparatively few Negroes come from advantaged backgrounds, the Commission pointed out that desegregation would be necessary to remedy social class isolation as well as racial isolation.

The independent, bipartisan Federal agency reported that it also found evidence which suggested that white children are handicapped when they are educated in all-white schools. White adults with racially isolated backgrounds, the Commission found, tend to resist measures designed to overcome discrimination against Negroes while whites who have had a desegregated education are more likely to report a willingness to accept Negroes in desegregated situations and to support measures that will afford equal opportunity.

"Although it cannot be documented in traditional ways, we believe that white children are deprived of something of value when they grow up in isolation from children of other races, when their self-esteem and assurance may rest in part upon false notions of racial superiority, when they are not prepared by their school experience to participate fully in a world rich in human diversity," said the Commission. "These losses, although not as tangible as those which racial isolation inflicts upon Negro youngsters, are real enough to deserve the attention of parents concerned about their children's development."

The Nation's metropolitan areas are becoming increasingly separated socially and economically as well as racially, the Commission found in its study.

"Racial isolation in the public schools is intense throughout the United States," the Commission reported. "In the Nation's metropolitan areas, where two-thirds of both the Negro and white population now live, it is most severe. Seventy-five percent of the Negro elementary students in the Nation's cities are in schools with enrollments that are nearly all-Negro while 83 percent of the white students are in nearly all-white schools. Nearly nine of every 10 Negro elementary students in the cities attend majority-Negro schools."

The Commission assessed existing remedies for racial isolation, including programs of school desegregation and compensatory education. The Commission reviewed and evaluated compensatory education programs (the Banneker Project in St. Louis, Mo., the Higher Horizons Program for Underprivileged Children in New York City, the All Day Neighborhood School Program in New York City, the Madison Area Project in Syracuse, N.Y., the Education Improvement Program in Philadelphia, Pa., and similar programs in Seattle, Wash. and Berkeley, Calif.) It concluded that such programs have been of limited effectiveness in improving the achievement of Negro students. The difficulty, the Commission pointed out, is that compensatory education programs have attempted to solve problems that stem primarily from racial and social class isolation in schools which themselves are isolated by race and social class.

The Commission also examined desegregation programs and found that the desegregation of schools is consistent with maintaining and improving the quality of education for all children. The Commission said that its study produced convincing evidence, both by practical demonstrations and sound proposals, that it is possible to remedy racial isolation and improve the quality of education for all children. While public attention has been focused upon the more dramatic controversies, small cities and suburban communities have used a variety of successful techniques to quietly integrate their schools, and improve the quality of education for their children, the Agency reported.

Congress has the power to enact legislation to remedy the inequality of educational opportunity to which Negro students are subjected, said the Commission. With its ability to appropriate funds, Congress is the branch of Government best able to assure quality education and equal educational opportunity, the Agency continued. New legislation to establish equal educational opportunity of high quality for all children, the Commission suggested, should embody certain essential principles:

1. There should be a uniform standard providing for the elimination of racial isolation in the schools. Without outlining the needed legislation, the Commission commended as a reasonable standard the criterion already adopted by the legislature in Massachusetts and the New York State Commissioner of Education, defining as racially imbalanced those schools in which Negro pupils constitute more than 50 percent of the total enrollment.



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The Commission said it found that when Negro students in schools with more than 50 percent Negro enrollment were compared with similarly situated Negro students in schools with a majority-white enrollment, there were significant differences in attitude and performance.

2. Each of the 50 States should be vested with the responsibility for meeting any standard established by Congress and allowed maximum flexibility in devising appropriate remedies. "It would be unwise for the Federal Government to attempt to prescribe any single solution or set of solutions for the entire Nation," said the Commission. "Each State should be free to adopt solutions best suited to the particular needs of its individual communities." The Commission noted that in many jurisdictions, especially the major cities, solutions are not possible without the cooperation of neighboring communities.

3. There should be Federal programs of substantial financial assistance to the States to provide for the construction of new facilities and improvement in the quality of education. The desegregation of the public schools, particularly in the major cities, will require the construction of new facilities designed both to serve a larger student population and to be accessible to all children in the area to be served, said the Commission. Federal financial assistance is needed to improve the quality of education so that more attention can be given to the individual needs of children, the report said.

4. There should be adequate time in which to accomplish the goals of the new legislation. Acknowledging that equal opportunity in education cannot be achieved immediately, the Commission said that adequate time must be allowed for educational and physical planning, assembling and acquiring land, and building new facilities. "However, since the problem is urgent a prompt start must be made toward finding solutions, progress must be continuous and substantial, and there must be some assurance that the job will be completed as quickly as possible," said the Commission.

The Commission recommended further that Congress consider legislation which would prohibit discrimination in the sale or rental of housing and expand programs of Federal assistance designed to increase the supply of low and moderate income housing throughout metropolitan areas. Progress toward the goal of equal housing opportunity will facilitate achievement of the goal of equal educational opportunity, the Commission observed.

Pointing out that "to make integrated education dependent upon open housing is to consign at least another generation of children to racially isolated schools," the Commission recommended however that the Department of Housing and Urban Development require that low and moderate income housing, including the selection of sites for such housing, be planned on a nondiscriminatory basis; and that the Department require that relocation programs for persons displaced by urban renewal projects be designed in a nondiscriminatory manner that would prevent perpetuation of ghetto neighborhoods. Reduced residential concentrations of racial groups would facilitate the elimination of racially imbalanced schools, the Commission said.



The report was requested by President Johnson in November 1965 when he observed that racial isolation in the schools "presented serious barriers to quality education" and asked the Commission to "gather the facts" and make them available to the Nation. The President expressed the hope that the Commission's report would "provide a basis for action not only by the Federal Government but also by the States and local school boards which bear the direct responsibility for assuring quality education."

The Commission stressed that solutions to racial isolation must be those that not only will remedy injustice, but improve the quality of education for all children. In most areas, the Commission said, the issue has been approached calmly and compassionately, with a view toward improving the quality of education for all children. "Steps have been taken to maintain and improve educational standards, to avoid the possibility of interracial frictions, and to provide remedial services for children who need them," said the report. "And, in most cases, the conclusion has been that advantaged children have not suffered from educational exposure to others not as well off, and that the results have been of benefit to all children, white and Negro alike."

In cases where larger cities have received the cooperation of suburban school districts to achieve integration, the Commission pointed out, "Negro parents have reported that the values of better education have not been diminished by the bus trips necessary to obtain it and white parents have reported that their children have benefited from the experience. Administrators and teachers have described the educational results as positive.



"Fears of the unknown, therefore, are being refuted by practical experience," said the Commission. "Efforts to achieve integration by establishing schools serving a wider community clearly will be more difficult and costly in large cities than in smaller cities and suburban communities, but there is every indication that they will yield beneficial results."

Two members of the Commission wrote concurring statements to the report.

Frankie M. Freeman wrote: "To the extent that the civil rights movement of the past several years has produced an impatience with the status quo, an upsurge of self-esteem, and a new assertion of dignity and identity among Negro citizens, it is healthy and long overdue. However, there is little that is healthy and much that is potentially self-defeating in the emotionalism and racial bias that seem to motivate a small but vocal minority among those who now argue for 'separate-but-equal' school systems. . . . Quite aside from being poor democracy, it would seem to be poor economy, and criminally poor educational policy, to continue to isolate disadvantaged children by race and class when it is the interaction with advantaged children which appears to be the single most effective factor in narrowing the learning gap."

The Reverent Theodore M. Hesburgh wrote: ". . . it would seem most important to me, speaking as an individual member of this Commission, that those involved in all of the private elementary and secondary educational endeavors in this country study the full implications of this report and consider most seriously what their institutions might contribute to the ultimate solution of this pressing problem."

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan agency created by Congress in 1957. Among other duties it is charged with the responsibility of reviewing Federal laws and policies with respect to denials of equal protection of the laws under the Constitution. John A. Hannah, President of Michigan State University, is Chairman and Eugene Patterson, Editor of the Atlanta Constitution, is Vice Chairman of the Commission. Members of the Commission include Frankie M. Freeman, Associate General Counsel of the St. Louis Housing and Land Clearance Authorities; Erwin N. Griswold, Dean of the Harvard University School of Law; the Reverend Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., President of Notre Dame University; and Robert S. Rankin, Professor of Political Science, Duke University.

William L. Taylor, Staff Director of the Agency, supervised the study and David K. Cohen of the Commission staff was Director of the Race and Education Study.