The Kerner Report represented the last gasp of 1960s liberalism—the last full-throated declaration that the federal government should play a leading role in solving deeply embedded problems such as racism and poverty. A Democratic Congress would continue to pass progressive legislation for the next decade, but none of it came close to the ambition and scope of the Kerner Commission recommendations.

The real novelty of Separate and Unequal lies in the numerous oral history interviews Gillon conducted with surviving Commission participants. Gillon manages to condense his vast archive into ten chapters describing every internal quarrel in exhaustive detail. This is a book for hard-core policy historians of the Kerner Commission—the interested but lay reader might tire of wading through this thorough account of the Commission.