

Un paso pa'lante y dos pa'tras

Kenneth J. Meier and Joseph Stewart, Jr.

THE POLITICS OF HISPANIC EDUCATION UN PASO PA'LANTE Y DOS PA'TRAS

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To Felix Tijerina and José Angel Gutiérrez, two men who understand the politics of education.

Acknowledgments

This book is the culmination of several years work on the topic of educational discrimination. Much of our research examined second-generation discrimination against black students. Our recent book *Race, Class and Education: The Politics of Second Generation Discrimination* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989) summarizes that research.

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> —Milwaukee, Wisconsin and Dallas, Texas April 1990

The dramatic struggle of black Americans to achieve equal access to education is well known. The corresponding struggle of Hispanic Americans has been relegated to a sidebar or ignored completely. Hispanics, the second-largest and fastest-growing minority in the United States, have been and continue to be denied access to Anglo institutions of education. They have higher dropout rates, lower levels of educational attainment, and receive education of distinctly inferior quality. This book is an in-depth examination of 142 United States school districts with at least 5,000 students and 5 percent Hispanic enrollment. It uses quantitative, historical, and legal analysis to understand Hispanic inequities in education and what can be done about them.

Four major arguments are presented. First, segregation is not necessary to deny Hispanic students access to equal educational opportunities. While Hispanic students are more segregated than black students, other more subtle methods are equally effective in denying access to education. Academic grouping including special education, ability grouping, curriculum tracking, and segregated bilingual education can be used to separate Hispanic students from their Anglo schoolmates and to limit Hispanic educational opportunities. Similarly, ethnic disparities in discipline can be used to discourage Hispanic students from remaining in school. Discriminatory use of academic grouping and discipline has been termed "second-generation educational discrimination." Through the use of such techniques, Hispanic students can be induced to drop out of school, resulting in lower levels of educational attainment. Those Hispanics who remain in school receive a lower quality education.

Second, education is a political process. Second-generation discrimination exists because Hispanics lack the political power to prevent such actions. School districts with greater Hispanic representation on the school board and among teaching faculty experience significantly less second-generation discrimination against

Hispanic students. Representation on the school board results from mobilized Hispanic political resources and a favorable school district political structure (ward rather than at-large elections). Greater school board representation, in turn, leads to greater Hispanic representation in administrative positions, which leads to more Hispanic teachers. Increases in Hispanic representation, then, produce educational policies that benefit Hispanic students.

Third, discrimination against Hispanic students results from both race and social class. Using the power thesis of intergroup relations, this analysis argues that intergroup differences generate intergroup hostility. Discrimination against Hispanic students is a function of both their ethnicity and their lower social class background. As Hispanics become more middle-class, the level of discrimination decreases. Similarly when blacks attend the school system in large numbers, the prime focus of discrimination is against blacks; and Hispanic students are subject to less discrimination. The racial and class patterns in the school system simply mirror those in the political process. Hispanics achieve their greatest political successes in districts with larger proportions of lower-class Anglos and larger proportions of blacks.

Fourth, politics and the policy process differ greatly among the various subgroups of Hispanics. By examining Mexican-American, Cuban-American, and Puerto Rican school districts, generalizations are made about each. Cuban Americans have the economic and political resources to avoid most negative aspects of second generation discrimination; as a result, they do well in the educational system. Mexican Americans' educational experiences are a function of their political resources. Where they have extensive political representation, they have been able to reduce the level of discrimination. Where they do not, they are a subordinate racial minority. Puerto Ricans fare the worst; their educational experiences resemble those of black Americans, but they do not have the compensating political resources that blacks possess. The situation of Puerto Ricans is especially grim for lower-class Puerto Ricans.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1 presents our political theory of educational policy. Representation in policy-making position is viewed as a function of political resources (numbers and education), social class, race, and district political structure. The theory links representation in policy-making positions to differences in public policy, with policy

a function of representation, political resources, race, social class, and school district size. Chapter 2 presents an overview of the politics in different Hispanic communities. The unique patterns of immigration, incorporation, and politics for Mexican Americans, Cuban Americans, and Puerto Ricans are discussed.

Chapter 3 is an historical overview of Hispanic efforts to gain access to equal educational opportunities. Educational policies have evolved from exclusion to segregation to the current use of second-generation educational discrimination. Chapter 4 examines the political representation of Hispanics on school boards, in administrative positions, and in teaching positions. The empirical analysis also assesses the prospects for black/brown coalitions in educational politics.

Chapter 5 documents the inequities in access to education. It argues that these patterns are consistent with the notion of discrimination and shows that political action can counter discrimination. Chapter 6 looks at the linkages among various aspects of second-generation discrimination. In addition, the relationships between second-generation discrimination and segregation and between second-generation discrimination and white flight from school systems are investigated. Chapter 7 provides a summary of the book's findings and a series of policy recommendations.

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Hispanic Representation and Equal Education

The Hispanic¹ quest for equal educational opportunities has paralleled that of black Americans, but the Hispanic movement was and remains clearly separate from the black movement. Hispanics were not part of the classic Brown v. Board of Education (1954) case that struck down the doctrine of separate but equal. The absence of Hispanics from this case should not be taken to imply that Hispanics were not segregated; separate Mexican schools were maintained by both Texas and California (Fernández and Guskin 1981, 112; San Miguel 1987; Cooke 1971). To gain access to local public schools, Hispanics fought a series of political and legal battles (see chapter 3). In states that maintained de jure segregated school systems, Hispanics filed suits to be declared "white" so that they could attend white schools (see San Miguel 1987). After desegregation became a reality, Hispanics sought the legal designation "minority" to avail themselves of remedies under the federal Civil Rights Acts. Not until 1975 did the U.S. Supreme Court recognize that educational discrimination against Hispanics must be considered in suits to desegregate public education (Keyes v. Denver).

The emphasis on desegregation and a more recent concern with bilingual education has shifted the focus somewhat from the original goal of obtaining equal access to educational opportunities. This study examines a series of actions that school districts can take to limit minority student access to education; these actions have been labeled "second-generation educational discrimination." Second-generation discrimination is the use of academic grouping and discipline in a discriminatory manner so that Hispanic students are separated from Anglos.² With this separation, Hispanic students are denied educational opportunities that are offered to Anglo students.

This chapter presents our theory of educational policy-making that we use to examine school district policies of academic grouping, discipline, and access to equal educational opportunity. After briefly stressing the fundamental importance of education as a method of combating discrimination, education is presented as a distinctly political process. By using a political focus for educational policy, we imply that Hispanics must gain access to political and administrative policy-making positions to affect educational policies directed at Hispanic students. A theory of minority representation that has been used to account for black representation on school boards, in administrative positions, and on faculties (see Meier, Stewart, and England 1989) is adapted to Hispanics. Finally, Hispanic representation is integrated into a theory of public policy-making that includes Hispanic political resources, social class pressures, racial competition, and school district size.

The Crucial Nature of Education

Discrimination on the basis of race or ethnicity can affect an individual's employment, level of income, quality of housing, access to health care, etc. Of all the forums for discrimination, discrimination in education is the most invidious. In a nation that prides itself on the ideal of upward social mobility, the ability to rise above one's social origins is heavily dependent on attaining a quality education. If Hispanics are denied equal access to education and, as a result, receive less formal education or receive education of inferior quality, then discrimination in other areas is much easier. Without education, a person may not be hired because he or she is not qualified. Without a job, inadequacies in income, housing, health care, and countless other amenities of life are exacerbated.

The linkage between education and income is not new; it forms the backbone of the human capital approach to economics. Human capital proponents argue that the primary determinant of a person's income is that person's investment in education, either in formal education or on-the-job training (Schultz 1961; Becker 1975). In the University of Michigan's longitudinal study of poverty, Greg Duncan reports that "differences in the level of education can account for a substantial share of the long-run earnings differences between individuals" (1984, p. 109). Although Duncan can explain only 15 percent of the variation in earnings with education, this is five times the variation that can be explained by other factors such as work experience, test scores, achievement motivation, father's education, and personal efficacy.

Human capital studies often produce what is called a rate of return on education: the percentage gain in income that results from an additional year of education. Cotton found that the rate of return on education for Mexican Americans in 1980 was 6.25 percent (1985, p. 875). This figure is significantly above his estimate of the rate of return for blacks (3.89 percent) and approximately equal to the rate of return for Anglos (6.72 percent). Using a different methodology, Bean and Tienda estimate that the returns on investment in education are 4.5 percent for Mexican Americans, 5.6 percent for Puerto Ricans, and 4.3 percent for Cuban Americans (1987, p. 380). Unfortunately, Bean and Tienda do not provide a return on investment estimate for Anglos.

Although other studies of Mexican American workers do not indicate that they receive the same returns on education as Anglos (e.g., Verdugo and Verdugo 1983, 421), many of these studies are limited because they do not distinguish the quality of education that individuals receive (see Penley, Gould, and de la Vina 1983, 445). As we argue in this research, the quality of education received by Hispanics in the United States is not equal to that received by Anglos (see chapter 5). Penley, Gould, and de la Vina (1983, p. 449) circumvented this problem by studying only graduates of accredited business schools; they found no difference in the earnings of Mexican Americans and Anglos when one controlled for sex, age, experience, college grades, and industry of occupation.

An additional way to examine the relationship between education and income for Hispanics is to examine these variables for the school districts in this study. Using the percentage of Hispanics with high school diplomas in 1980 to predict average Hispanic income, Table 1–1 shows a strong positive relationship. Education by itself explains 45 percent of the variation in Hispanic incomes across the school districts.

Table 1-1 The Relationship Between Hispanic Education and Income

Hispanic Median Income = \$9,184 + \$193.55 x Percent High School Grads $r^2 = .45$ F = 110.74 N = 137

Education not only improves a person's ability to earn an income, it also improves access to specific types of jobs. Access to professional jobs—doctors, lawyers, accountants, etc.—is limited