

Abstract

A History of Unequal Opportunity in the U.S. Segregation of Latino School Children

Half a century has passed since the U.S. Supreme Court famously stated that separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. After all this time, separate facilities are still the reality and they are still unequal.

This thesis examines the educational experience of Latino children in the United States from the twentieth century up to the present, with the main focus on the area of the American Southwest. The history of Latino school segregation is examined from the legal perspective, focusing on the significant court cases in which Latinos fought against segregation and for equal educational opportunities. A special attention is paid to *Mendez v. Westminster* federal court case, which has ended de jure segregation of Latinos after the World War II. While the topic of school segregation in relation to Latinos is often overlooked by professional literature and little known to the public, it is very important as Latinos represent one fourth of all public school children in the United States today.

This paper concludes that, because of school segregation, the educational history of Latinos in the United States is one of unequal opportunity. Moreover, the educational opportunities of Latino children remain restricted by segregation in the present, when Latinos represent the most segregated minority in American public schools. As most segregated schools are inferior in terms of quality, this means that there is not a level playing field for all children at the start. As a result some children must try much harder in order to succeed.

Keywords: Latinos, Hispanics, Education, School segregation, Public schools, Inequality, Mendez v. Westminster, U.S. Southwest, United States