



## — On Hispanic Education: —

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### The Social Studies and Hispanics: Part I

For Hispanics, the social studies curriculum is one of the most important of all the curricula offered in our public schools. Until Hispanics in the U.S. have attained, as a group, equality and equity with the non-Hispanic majority in our society, the social studies will remain one of the most crucial competency/knowledge areas. In arriving at such equity, the social studies curriculum provides perhaps the greatest potential for remedying the wrongs of the past; creating social change in the present, and maintaining in the future the advances we make for ourselves in this country. To help Hispanics attain and maintain the rights and privileges due to them as U.S. citizens, instruction in the social studies for Hispanic students must be given much greater attention today than has been done in the past.

From kindergarten through college, Hispanic students should be exposed to and attain mastery in those areas of the social studies which impact significantly on their role as citizens in this country. As a language minority group in a country that claims to be the freest country in the world, Hispanics must never lose sight of the fact that they as a group have not attained the freedoms that most of the majority have. The freedoms that I am talking about are freedom from hunger, illness, ignorance, injustice, poverty, and oppression of our people in numerous ways. Furthermore, not one of us is free, until all vestiges of social inequality and nonequity for all Hispanic citizens are done away with in our country.

It is essential, therefore, that appropriate instruction in grades K-12 take place in the following areas of the social studies: a) the history in our country of Hispanics; b) the Constitution of the United States of America; c) the political process for the election of those in public office, and for getting legislation passed; d) our economic system; and e) the social status of Hispanics. While these areas are not exhaustive of all important areas of the social studies curriculum for and about Hispanics, they nevertheless represent some of the most important. It should also be kept in mind that instruction in the above areas should be developmentally appropriate to take into account the Hispanic child's skills, age, grade level, and/or language proficiency (in Spanish or English).

No self-respecting person of Hispanic origin should finish kindergarten without knowing that his or her ancestors were here before the Mayflower. The history of Hispanic peoples within the geopolitical borders we now call the U.S.A. predates Anglo influences in this country. Hispanics played a role in the making of this country before, during, and after the present borders were established. The education of our Hispanic children must never ever ignore this fact. Indeed, neither should they ever forget that our mestizo heritage includes ancestors in the Western Hemisphere eons before the Spanish ever set foot on this land. It is sad, but true, that Hispanics aren't educated enough about their North, Central, and South American aborigine ancestry in the Western Hemisphere. Failure to recognize our American Indian ancestry ignores half of our entire genetic, cultural, and linguistic heritage.

Mexican Americans in particular should be educated to

know and appreciate the concept that North America includes Canada, the U.S., and Mexico! Furthermore, to reinforce our cultural kinship with our other Hispanic brethren in other parts of the Western Hemisphere, Hispanics in the U.S. should be taught that the term "America" was a name given to the entire Western Hemisphere to honor a Latino and that "America" (the combined North, Central, and South) is predominantly Spanish-speaking.

Once having received a thorough grounding on the influence of Hispanics in their state, in the U.S.A., and in the Western Hemisphere, Hispanic students should be educated about the influence of Spain in the entire world. The teaching of history in the classes of our nation should never distort nor diminish the role of Hispanics in our country, not for any student, and most assuredly, not for our Hispanic children! No Hispanic student in the U.S.A. should come out of the public school system thinking that his or her ancestors played a small or insignificant role in the history of our nation.

The second area of crucial importance in the social studies for Hispanics is the Constitution of the United States of America. What makes Hispanics in the U.S.A. unique from other Hispanics in the world is the fact that they are supposed to be protected and governed under the U.S. Constitution. Although the average citizen cannot be expected to be an expert in constitutional law, every Hispanic citizen should have a thorough grounding on the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and their meaning and significance. In many ways, what makes Hispanics ineffective in their every day lives in the United States, is their ignorance or lack of understanding of what are their fundamental rights, like freedom of speech, the right to peaceably assemble, to vote, to have due process, freedom from unlawful arrest, etc.

When Hispanics salute the flag, die for their country, and are "proud to be American," they should do this because of their love and understanding of the Constitution of the United States of America. Our children should grow up to have respect for the law because the law, i.e., the Constitution, has respect for them. We seek the promise of liberty and justice for all because the Constitution protects and guarantees this. When Hispanics from other countries and/or backgrounds ask us why we love America so much, we should be able to point to the U.S. Constitution as the basis.

Related to the understanding and appreciation of the U.S. Constitution by Hispanics are the appreciation, for example, of the concept of rule by laws not by men, the sometimes long process of attaining justice through our court system, and the relationship of other laws, state constitutions, and treaties to the Constitution. A very important treaty, for example, that Mexican Americans in particular should be aware of is the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and its supposed guarantees to Chicanos. Overall, however, Hispanic U.S. citizens should have a sound understanding of the application of the fundamental law of our land, the U.S. Constitution, to our daily lives. (To be continued)