



## On Hispanic Education:

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### The Social Studies and Hispanics: Part II

In the first part of this article I listed five areas of the social studies in which I felt appropriate instruction for Hispanics was essential. Having written about two of these areas, i.e., the history in our country of Hispanics, and the Constitution of the United States of America, let me discuss two additional areas: 1) the political process for the election of those in public office, and for getting legislation passed; and 2) our economic system.

Our social studies curriculum for Hispanics, from kindergarten through college, should empower Hispanics to become involved and be influential in the political process in their communities, state, and nation. Since Hispanics are in the minority, ignorance of the political process for the election of public officials is seven more detrimental than such ignorance by those in the majority. Apathy by Hispanics once they have attained knowledge of the political process is unforgivable. Hispanic students should be given abundant opportunities during their public school education to actually simulate, practice, or experience election to office for all levels of government from student council representative to precinct delegate to President of the U.S.

Having understood thoroughly how persons get elected to public office, the social studies curriculum should educate Hispanics about what is not always taught in civic books and civic classes: Through the ballot not the bullet, political power is taken, not given. Sometimes political power is shared, but even then it is not given. Those in public office, no matter how sympathetic to Hispanic needs and concerns will not give up their elected office just to please Hispanics. Even if a person sufficiently sympathetic to Hispanic concerns is in office, the powers of decision, influence, and prerogative will not be relinquished just to make Hispanics happy. Hispanics need, therefore, to learn political skills, maneuvers, and techniques whereby persons in public office can be replaced if unsatisfactory, and if satisfactory, can nevertheless be continually motivated to do what Hispanic need done.

In addition, the social studies curriculum in our schools should empower Hispanics through knowledge, experience, and opportunity to get laws and policies passed which will favor their interests. It should not be left up to just our local, state, and federal law and policy makers, for example, to initiate laws and policies that are favorable to Hispanics. Hispanics, too, should initiate sample policies, legislation, and, if need be, Constitutional amendments, to be introduced by elected officials at their respective levels of government. In other words, Hispanics need to know how to be effective lobbyists for their interests and how to be successful in getting laws and policies passed that are in their interests. Before Hispanics leave high school, for example, they should be able to introduce legislation to their congressperson and follow closely the process whereby such legislation is passed or not passed.

The other social studies curriculum area of importance to Hispanics is the economic system operating in the

United States. Our free enterprise capitalistic system of wealth distribution and resource allocation must be more thoroughly understood by our Hispanic students. Why, how, by whom, and when wealth is acquired in the U.S. must be given one of the highest priorities in the social studies curriculum for Hispanics. Our Hispanic students should learn, for example, why and how most of the wealth of this country is controlled by a relative handful of people in our population. Hispanic students should also be taught that no one is going to "teach" them how to get rich. Information about true wealth attainment in our society is not necessarily public information! The likelihood that rich individuals will make known their money-making secrets is not great, unless they are very very charitable.

The social studies curriculum should teach Hispanics early in and throughout their schooling, for example, that if getting rich were easy, everybody would be rich. Our students should know that legal wealth attainment can come about through inheritance, luck, or hard work—but hard work is the only means that we should count on to get rich. Our Hispanic students should be shown example after example of individuals who started out penniless and made a fortune for themselves. But even more important, our students need to know **how** this was done.

Being rich in our society is many times also a matter of controlling the means of production. Unless a Hispanic inherits great wealth, is bestowed with great natural talents, or wins a lottery, it is not likely that that person will be in a position to control the means of production. Hispanics should always be educated about the root source of any product, service, or money. That root source, once controlled will be the source of wealth. Our Hispanic children should learn through the social studies curriculum, therefore, how and why wealthy individuals acquired control of the means of production to attain wealth. Furthermore, our students should learn how such control of production and wealth were protected and kept once control was gained!

The social studies curriculum should further stress that in our economic system, individuals compete for wealth by producing or doing something faster, better, or nicer. Hispanics should learn, therefore, how other individuals advanced their careers, products, or services by doing so. Learning about how individuals, companies, and whole countries can gain the economic edge over others is key to learning how economic advantage is acquired. Of greater importance to our Hispanic students, however, is how our systems of "free" enterprise, if unchecked, can suppress the ability, opportunity, and the right of others to gain economically. Our students should learn that the greatest threat to Hispanics in acquiring wealth is the loss of equal economic opportunity and fair competition. Racist, elitist, or just unfair practices by others in our society can limit the opportunity for the poor to become rich. Even though Hispanics are disenfranchised in so many ways in our society, we must make sure that one way in which they are **definitely not disenfranchised** is in how to get, keep, and protect economic power.