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# Racial Stratification, Social Consciousness, and the Education of Mexican Americans in Fabens, Texas: A Socio-Historical Case Study

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper explores, at a descriptive level, the relationship between racial stratification and the educational system in one southwestern town- Fabens, Texas. This article uses historical materials as well as data from a 1969 community survey of Fabens in describing how racial stratification originated, evolved, and maintained a rigid system of inequality in the community. Next, the author examines the "effect" racial stratification had on the educational system by describing the views parents, students, and teachers had about one another and about schooling. The analysis shows clearly how racial stratification relegated Mexican Americans to the lower rung of society in Fabens, and negatively affected their education.*

This paper explores, at a descriptive level, the relationship between racial stratification and an institution that takes a major role in perpetuating stratification—the educational system in Fabens, Texas<sup>1</sup>. Historical materials as well as data from a 1969 community survey of Fabens were used to describe how racial stratification originated, evolved, and maintained a rigid system of structured inequality in the community. Next, I look at the relationship between racial stratification and the maintenance of a segregated educational system by examining the social consciousness permeating the community: the views parents, students, and teachers had about one another and about schooling.

The framework and results from this study have implications beyond Fabens, Texas and the education of Mexican Americans. Indeed, race and ethnic relations and the educational experiences of all minority<sup>2</sup>

groups are deeply implicated. For example, the persistent segregation of Mexican-Americans and Black students in inferior schools and resources, which are highly related to poor academic achievement, are all implicated. In addition, in terms of social consciousness, there are the persistently negative views educators have of minority students, especially those from poor backgrounds. To a great extent, then, the research in this paper has universal implications for unequal distribution of educational resources.

## BACKGROUND

### *Racial Stratification*

Racial stratification is a system of structured inequality, where access to scarce and desired resources is based on ethnic/racial group membership. Racial stratification assigns roles and functions to individuals based on their ethnic-racial group membership<sup>3</sup>. These assignments have both physical and social consciousness consequences. Though stratification systems vary across time and space, two of its primary components appear to be ubiquitous: *ideological* and *structural*. Stratification systems have *ideologies* justifying their existence and have ranged from “the will of God” to those alleging biological superiority. Bierstedt (1963, 171) noted that “an ideology is an idea supported by a norm.” Ideologies, then, encompass norms, mores, folkways, values, and theories. Ideologies provide explanations for the order of things and, more importantly, they are rooted in group interests (Mannheim 1936, Chp. 2).

*Structural* mechanisms are a second component of stratification systems. Structural mechanisms involve the regular and patterned forms of separate or unequal treatment of groups. There are two such structural

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<sup>1</sup>Data for this study are from a 1969 community survey of Fabens, Texas conducted by William V. D’Antonio and Irwin Press. Professor D’Antonio kindly provided the original manuscript and all data collected from that study.

<sup>2</sup>My use of the term minority group in this paper is the sociological definition that combines both race and ethnicity with the lower status and power held by such groups (e.g., Native American Indians, Asians, Blacks, and Hispanics).

<sup>3</sup>Racial stratification is not unlike other forms of group differentiation. For a definition of social stratification see Lenski (1966). For other definitions of racial stratification see Blalock (1967), Lieberman (1961), and Olsen (1970). Moreover, there is some agreement among scholars that racial stratification systems arise when the following conditions are present: (1) contact between two or more races; (2) one group has a power advantage; (3) there is competition over scarce and desired sources; and (4) ethnocentrism/racism exists (Noel, 1968; Wilson 1973). For an excellent discussion see H. Edward Ransford (1977, especially chapters 2 and 3).

mechanisms that appear to characterize stratification systems: *behavioral* and *physical*. Examples of behavioral mechanisms include the norms that lead to inequitable treatment and discrimination. Housing and occupational segregation are examples of the physical mechanisms characterizing stratification systems. Structural mechanisms, then, involve specific kinds of social interactions, including the separation of groups.

Structural and ideological mechanisms not only reinforce one another, but they also serve to justify and maintain social order. There is a built-in tautology to their relationship: an ideology justifies differential treatment or structural separation, and a given structure, in turn, perpetuates and reinforces an ideology (e.g., group norms, values, and stereotypes).

A system of racial stratification exists if race and ethnic group membership are the basis for a system of structured inequality. Race and ethnicity are used as a “way of classifying people and their functions, of prescribing which sorts of people should do what sort of things” (Hodges 1964, 8). The overall effect of racial stratification is the separation of racial groups, both physically and in the social conscience (see Blank, Dabady, and Citra 2004).

### *Educational Stratification*

Educational stratification involves the differentiation and differential treatment of students within the educational system. Most often the differentiation of students is said to be based on merit, e.g., grades, tests, and other forms of educational performance. This is the ideal; in reality, however, there is ample evidence suggesting that such ascriptive traits, as sex, race, and social class position are also used to differentiate students. While many individuals extol the virtues of education, the fact remains that its most fundamental role is to sort and rank individuals as they progress through school (Spring 1976). Education is seen as a process that grooms individuals for the roles they will take in the larger social system because there is a need to identify the most suitable individuals for important roles in society (Davis and Moore 1945).

The dominant belief in the U.S. is that students are sorted by their talent as exemplified by their school performance, e.g., grades and tests. Such a viewpoint has sparked a considerable amount of debate because tests and grades are themselves endogenous factors requiring explanation. Critics, for example, point out that teacher expectations affect student performance (Cicourel and Kitsuse 1977; Rosenthal and Jacobson 1968). Others have argued that education reproduces “the structure of power relations and symbolic relations between classes” (Bourdieu 1977: 487); that is, education reproduces a given social order based on class, sex, and race-ethnicity. In this light, Bowles and Gintis (1976) point out that there is a strong correspondence

between the values, norms, and skills of the workplace and those in the classroom. Additionally, Anyon (1980) found that expectations and the manner of instruction varied significantly by the social class of the school population; the greater the social class background, the greater the autonomy educators gave to their students. Educational systems are part and parcel of a given social hierarchy existing in the larger society.

### *Racial Stratification and the Educational System: Ideology and Structure*

Racial stratification is ubiquitous: it infiltrates all aspects of community life. In this paper, the central question is, "To what extent does racial stratification infiltrate the educational system?" Specifically, given a system of racial stratification, whose main objective is to maintain racial and ethnic social order, and an educational system that distributes people in the larger social hierarchy, how does education become a tool for perpetuating structured inequality based on race and ethnicity? In this section, I develop a model that helps us examine the relationship between racial stratification and the educational system.

*1. Ideological Mechanisms.* As an ideology, racism appears to influence the educational system in at least five ways<sup>4</sup>. First, race creates and reinforces negative stereotypes about ethnic/racial minorities. A considerable body of research has substantiated such a conjecture. For example, research has pointed out that the negative racial stereotypes and attitudes held by some educators affects the educational accomplishments of minority students. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) discovered that teachers' expectations affect student performance<sup>5</sup>. Cicourel and Kitsuse (1977) pointed out that school personnel frequently use subjective-normative conceptions in their evaluations of students, which have negative effects on their students. Negative racial stereotypes influence student performance because teachers are less likely to interact with these students, are more likely to interact negatively with them, and/or fail to give such students the benefit of the doubt when it comes to performance and behavior. One important result is the loosening of the bonds minority students might have developed with their school.

Second, race enters the curriculum by depicting minorities negatively, falsely, or not at all (Knowles and Prewitt 1969; US Commission on Civil Rights 1980)<sup>6</sup>. The net effect is not only to perpetuate race-based beliefs, but also to influence the perceptions minorities have about themselves (La Barea 1986). In any event, the curriculum fails to positively serve certain ethnic-racial groups.

Third, the use of IQ and other ability tests reinforces race-based beliefs because they tend to measure the knowledge-based domain of the

dominant caste. Tests are used to label poor and minority students and to funnel them into remedial programs. Olmedo (1977: 177) says: “The empirical evidence now available often leads to ambiguous and contradictory conclusions.”

Fourth, the views non-minority students have of minority students can also be an important indicator of racial stratification and how it has penetrated the educational system. Minority students might be viewed as less competent and lacking initiative that is needed to undertake rigorous academic work. These views affect race relations in the school, increase group differentiation, and may also heighten racial tension<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, minority students may internalize these views about themselves and take two paths, both of which have negative academic effects. They might develop deep-seated feelings of inferiority and incompetence. In addition, minority students may develop anti-school/academic views and disengage from school, as reflected in the current issue about minority students’ resistance to school and its culture (see Verdugo 2002a; 2002b).

Finally, parents play an important role in the educational process of their children. In particular, parental involvement in the education of their children, and the views school personnel have of parents are important. Parents of minority students tend to have little contact with the educational system and when they do it is often negative. Also, parents of minority students may be viewed negatively by school personnel, and may receive much of the blame for their children’s poor academic performance.

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<sup>4</sup>The most obvious ideological view held by dominant group members is racism. Racism as used in this paper is similar to that of Wilson’s (1973: 32-33). Wilson states that there are two components of racism: biological and cultural. While biological racism preaches inherent inferiority of subordinate groups, cultural racism maintains that subordinate groups are culturally inferior, and with the proper training can better themselves. Also, see Ogbu (1978: 131-147) for a discussion of the subtle mechanisms of racial stratification.

<sup>5</sup>It should be noted, however, that some scholars have criticized Rosehtnal and Jacobsons’ study on methodological grounds (Brophy and Good 1974; Elashoff and Snow 1972; Dusek 1975; Snow 1969; Taylor 1970; Thorndike 1968, 1969). But as Rist (1979) points out, the criticism has focused on methods and analysis rather than on the behavior-expectation relationship. The current state of the debate is that in some cases the self-fulfilling prophecy works out if teachers’ expectations are consistent and if the student does not resist such labeling. (However, if there is resistance it may reinforce already existing labels or merely create new ones, e.g., malcontent, juvenile delinquent. For an excellent discussion of a related topic—student resistance—see Henri Giroux (1983). Also see Alexander et al (1988).

<sup>6</sup>For some discussion about how Hispanics are treated in texts see the Council on Interracial Books for Children (1972, 1975), and Gaines (1975). There are two themes emanating from this literature in the ways Hispanics are depicted: that they live in poverty and that they are violent.

The above arguments are captured in the following two hypotheses:

*H1a: Racial stratification as an ideology affects minority educational achievement by creating a set of low educational expectations for minority students, not only among minority students themselves, but it also shapes the attitudes of teachers, parents and non-minority students.*

*H1b: The lower the expectations that teachers have of minority students, the less attachment minority families have with the educational system.*

2. *Structural Mechanisms.* Structurally, racial stratification penetrates the educational system and has two major consequences: it segregates students within and between schools, and it segregates them in the general social consciousness. Within school segregation can be seen by large proportions of ethnic/racial minorities in non-academic tracks, in special education programs (Oakes 1982), and by their placement in non-academic alternative schools (Verdugo and Glen 2005). Such a structure also creates an imposing barrier because it limits the chances minority students have of attaining additional schooling and, therefore, the opportunity for upward social mobility.

Structural mechanisms also operate between schools. Scholars have found that schools play a central role in legitimizing stratification (Clark 1960; Rothbart 1970), and that one important structural mechanism is segregation. Between school segregation not only separates ethnic/racial groups and leaves no or little room for interaction, but as such it is tied to an uneven distribution of resources, e.g., minority schools have less resources than non-minority schools. In some cases, the difference in school resources between schools, based on race, can be overwhelming.

An important type of structural mechanism is the separation of groups in the social consciousness. By this I mean that groups lack a social connection to one another as members of a community (Ossowski 1963).

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<sup>7</sup>Parsons (1965) says the following:

Ethnically differentiated social patterns and associated stereotypes are learned by village children quite early. After the second grade, Anglo and Mexican-American children increasingly restrict their social choices to members of their own ethnic group. By the time they reach the upper elementary grades, there is virtually complete social separation between the two groups. That the children are aware of Anglo dominance is reflected in their leadership and prestige choices. Both Anglo and Mexican-American children choose Anglos as sources of prestige and both groups make significant choices of Anglos for positions of leadership (p. 156).

See also Comer (1984), Eder (1985), Grant (1984), Oakes (1982), and Waller (1967).

Instead, distinctions are made between groups that are used to identify them as members of one community or another, and criteria are used to determine such group membership. For example, ethnic-racial minorities are viewed as less competent or as lacking the ambition to succeed in school. In addition, ethnic-minority students might react to such designations by exhibiting low-self esteem or by developing “oppositional” stances to school. Esposito (1973) found that low tracking reduces self-esteem among students and increases their disengagement from the institution (see, also, Litt 1963; Steinitz et al. 1973).

Two hypotheses follow from our arguments about social structure:

*H2a: Racial stratification affects educational stratification spatially by tracking minorities in less demanding curriculum because they are not expected to do well in more demanding classes.*

*H2b: In extreme forms of racial stratification, minority students are physically separated from non-minority students (i.e., sent to different schools), and minority students then develop low expectations for themselves, disengage from the educational institution and feel less a part of the broader community (Merton 1968).*

When racial stratification penetrates the educational system, formidable barriers are erected and severely limit minority students’ academic achievement. Students and teachers hold views, beliefs, and notions about race and ethnicity that taint inter-group interaction and influence minority student academic performance (Bowles and Gintis 1976; Chesler and Cave 1981). School texts tend to reinforce some of these stereotypes by depicting minorities negatively or not at all. Finally, racial stratification affects the parents of minority students by erecting social barriers that limit their involvement in school affairs or blame them for not caring about school, and they thus bear the brunt of their children’s poor academic performance. These are formidable structures for any group to overcome, but especially children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The net effect is to limit or block the lines of communication among all participants, eschewing any hope for progress and creating a social consciousness that impedes a sense of community (Ossowski, 1966).



## THE EDUCATION OF MEXICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN FABENS, TEXAS

This analysis begins by examining how war, land, and labor led to the development of racial stratification in Texas in general and in Fabens in particular<sup>8</sup>. Such a discussion will add some context to the analyses of education in Fabens, Texas.

### *War, Land, and Labor: The Creation of Racial Stratification in Fabens*

The Mexican-American War accentuated the intense competition between Mexicans and Anglos. Mexican officials had originally become suspicious of the growing presence of Americans in Texas. Indeed, the attempts of two standing American Presidents, John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson, to purchase Texas from Mexico fueled those suspicions.

There were several important roots to the problem: the concept of “Manifest Destiny,” the economic value of the Rio Grande, and U.S. cotton interests. The concept of Manifest Destiny gave the U.S. and its leaders an ideological justification for their westward expansion and the desire to dominate North America. The ideology stressed the destiny of the U.S. to take control of the continent—the idea that it was a superior nation and therefore entitled to have such control. This dominant sentiment is captured in the following statement by Ashbel Smith, a former secretary of state for the Texas Republic in 1848, in which he described the Mexican War as “part of a mission, of the destiny allotted to the Anglo-Saxon race...to civilize, to Americanize this continent” (cited in Montjano 1992: 24).

A second factor lay in economics. Indeed, Montejano (1992) argues that the Rio Grande was seen as a potential money maker because it would connect Santa Fe, New Mexico to Chichuahua, Mexico and open up trade with the world. But just as important was the port of Matamosos, where “silver bullion, lead, wool hides, and beef talon” (Montejano 1992: 16) all pushed through that port city. Thus, Texas, with the Rio Grande, seemed to many American businessmen in Texas a potential point of trading with the rest of the world.

Finally, there were U.S. cotton interests and the desire by some American businessmen to import more slaves for cotton production, as

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<sup>8</sup>Joan Moore (1970) points out that the conquest of Mexican Americans did not follow a common pattern: conquest in New Mexico followed a “class colonialism model,” “economic colonialism” characterized California, and “conflict colonialism” characterized Texas. And, given the extreme history of violence in Texas, it is not surprising that an extreme form of racial stratification evolved in that state. Also, for an excellent discussion of racial inequality in the southwest see Barrera (1979, especially chapters 1-3, and 7).

well as the interests of Anglos in Texas to engage in free trade with the U.S. (Meier and Rivera 1972). Mexico, however, had abolished slavery and since Texas was part of Mexico's territory, it was subject to Mexico's laws and policies. But, this fact did not impede US imperialism. The Mexican-American War began in 1846 and ended with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo two years later, in 1848.

The result of this War contributed to at least three important factors that lead to a system of racial stratification in Fabens. The first factor was the displacement of Mexicans from their land. Mexicans who remained in Texas were now under US law. What is noteworthy here is that Article (X) of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was taken off the Treaty. The article stated that land grants would be honored by the US government. Its absence from the Treaty opened the door for removing the native population from their lands. In Fabens, the displacement of the native populace from their land occurred both legally and illegally<sup>9</sup>. Legally, individuals (primarily Anglos) who coveted a piece of land would lobby local officials and demand that small farmers pay their delinquent taxes. For many of the original inhabitants, paying taxes was unheard of, and, besides, they had no money with which to pay such rents. Consequently, they were required to either leave the land or sell it at substantially reduced prices. One story of Fabens folklore, for example, says that the judge of the District Court colluded with big farmers in acquiring land for them and himself<sup>10</sup>.

Land was also acquired illegally. J.P. Miller, a big farmer, fenced in 25 acres of land that belonged to one of the original Mexican inhabitants and then "run him off," according to one Fabens informant. Further downstream, where there had been less Anglo power, resistance by Mexicans was stronger and Anglo farmers used greater force in achieving their goals. In 1917, for instance, Jesus Nunez, an old resident, was driven off his land by a land investment company, "They burned down his buildings, tore down his fences. He died in the county poor house," recalled one elderly informant (1969 field notes).

A segmented labor force, where a disproportionate number of Mexicans were in low paying, unskilled jobs whereas Anglos were disproportionately in better jobs, was a second factor contributing to racial stratification in Fabens. Historians have argued that the rapid economic expansion of the U.S. at the turn of the century (extract mining, railroad building, and agriculture) affected Mexicans in the Southwest (Barrera 1978; Garcia 1981) since there was a need for cheap unskilled labor, and Mexicans, who had recently been displaced from their land filled that need. Thus, almost immediately after the Treaty Mexicans began occupying the bottom rung of the economic occupational hierarchy.

Immigration from Mexico into the newly U.S. designated territory

also contributed to a segmented labor force. Gonzalez (1967: 52) states: “Most of these dispossessed persons became part of the farm labor force, whose ranks were swelled considerably by immigration from Mexico.” Immigration contributed to the segmented labor force because new arrivals from Mexico, being unattached to the land and the community, accepted

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<sup>9</sup>For example, in 1902 El Paso’s first private club, the Toltec Club, was formed with the sponsorship of H. L. Newman, Britton Davis, and J. Arthur Eddy. Some members of the club began companies that were able to control the sale of land in the El Paso-Fabens area: the Davis Investment Company, the Newman Investment Company, and the W. F. Payne Investment Company.

The displacement of the Mexican population from their land was a major factor in the evolution of racial stratification in Fabens. In Fabens, several events were major factors in this process: the Elephant Butte Dam Project, the Salt Wars, and the emergence of big farming. The Elephant Butte Dam Project was significant for two reasons. First, it opened the way for big farming in Fabens. A reliable source of water made the surrounding land, mostly desert, a haven for the farming industry.

The emergence of big farming in Fabens initiated conflict between big farms and small, mostly Mexican, farmers. It also transformed Mexicans from a small rural peasantry to a source of cheap labor. Second, it was instrumental in setting up the tightly woven network among Anglo businessmen who controlled the sale of property in the Fabens community that is described in the first paragraph of this footnote.

The Salt Wars fiasco was significant for three reasons. First it highlighted power differentials between Mexican and Anglos. Second, it heightened racial tension in Fabens. Third, it removed another piece of land from the indigenous Mexican population. The Salt Wars begins with the arrival of large numbers of Anglos into the Fabens community; with the arrival of the railroads, Anglos came to the community with the hope of becoming rich. Among the new arrivals was Charles Howard, a Missouri lawyer and Democrat who at one time had been a Lieutenant in the Confederate Army.

About ninety miles east of El Paso were some great salt deposits that were available to anyone without any restrictions. Howard obtained a certificate to the land, and served notice that the salt would thereafter be sold. When two Mexicans reported they would go and get salt any time they wished, Howard had them arrested. Shortly afterward, a group of about 40 to 50 armed men released the two Mexicans and arrested Howard and a county judge who had refused to imprison Howard (Mills 1962: 151).

Louis Cardis and Antonio Borjjs arranged for Howard to be released in exchange for his signing a statement saying that he would ‘forget all that had passed,’ leave the region permanently and immediately, leave the question of the salt deposits up to the courts, and give a \$12,000 bond to prove his good faith. Howard left the area, went to Mesilla, New Mexico where he telegraphed the Governor of Texas about the danger of an invasion from Mexico; a month later Howard returned to El Paso and shot Louis Cardis. After his release Howard and a group of men and a detachment of Texas Rangers set out for San Elizario to seize a load of salt. When they arrived a large group of armed Mexican men forced them to seek shelter in an adobe building. In the ensuing gun battle, Howard’s agent, Ellis, and a Texas Ranger were killed. Eventually, the Rangers surrendered, were disarmed and set free. Howard, Atkinson, and McBride were executed (Sonnichsen 1968).

The Salt Wars was investigated by a Congressional Committee in 1878, and the next year Fort Bliss was re-established. A Grand Jury indicted six men as the ringleaders, and offered rewards for their capture. They were never caught. Some of Faben’s elderly citizens recall that the Salt Wars escalated racial tensions in the community.

inferior jobs that paid low wages—and displaced native labor. Jobs held by Mexicans were also places where workers were exploited as a reserve Army or buffer labor force (Barrera 1979). Data in Table 1 show that much occupational segregation existed in the neighboring town of El Paso in the early part of the 20th century.

Occupational Group	1900		1920		1940	
	SS	NSS	SS	NSS	SS	NSS
Professional	3.03	12.59	3.31	13.82	2.42	18.50
Managers	3.64	13.20	2.00	15.79	2.42	14.45
Clerical	10.91	26.90	14.27	38.82	18.55	24.28
Craftsmen/ formen	10.91	25.38	12.58	10.53	11.29	9.25
Operatives	9.70	8.12	9.93	5.92	10.48	13.29
S e r v i c e Workers	16.36	10.66	39.07	11.48	36.29	18.50
Laborers	45.45	3.05	18.54	3.29	18.55	1.73
Dissimilarity		49.63		48.88		36.65

Source: Mario T. Garcia, 1981. *Desert Immigrants: The Mexicans of El Paso, 1880 – 1920*. P. 86. KEY: SS = Spanish Surname, NSS = Not Spanish Surname.

<sup>10</sup>When Howard first arrived in Fabens, he made two enemies quickly to whom the local Mexican citizenry looked up to as leaders: Louis Cardis and Antonio Borjis. In 1874, Howard was appointed District Judge.

In 1868, both wings of the Anglo Republican party, along with Cardis, Borjis, and J. M. Lujan combined forces with the goal of controlling the salt deposits just outside Fabens. Unfortunately, rivalries developed within the group or “salt ring” and the group disbanded. Sonnichsen (1969: 182) points out:

“...the Mexicans took it for granted that the salt could not be owned by any man or group of men. It would be fatal to make an open grab for it.”

Howard, however, was a reckless soul. “For any man, no matter how friendly he was with the Mexicans, to have attempted this would have been dangerous, but for Howard, who was not popular and who had a good many of the undesirable traits of a bully, to undertake it was simply foolhardy and hazardous.

The land on which the lakes are located was public and it was open to any man who had enough scrip in his possession to cover it...In the name of his father-in-law, Major George B. Zimpleman [an Austin banker, soldier and financier], he took up the land and as soon as the certificates of title were in his hands he served notice on the Mexican people on both sides of the river that thereafter salt would be sold at so much fanega [in 1877]” (White 1924: 116).

Mexican workers were highly concentrated in Labor and Service jobs from 1900 to 1940<sup>11</sup>. Indeed, from 1900 to 1940, both occupational categories accounted for about 60 percent of the Spanish surnamed labor force in El Paso. As a second measure of occupational segmentation, Indices of Dissimilarity (D) were computed. The Index ranges from 0 to 100: 0 being no segmentation and 100 being complete segmentation. In 1900, the Index was 49.63 and by 1940 it declined to 36.65. Thus, though there was some decline in occupational segregation, it remained at a high level, as there needed to be a 36 percent re-distribution of Anglos and Spanish speakers for both groups to be equally distributed across occupations.

Segmented labor markets are also characterized by differential wages to persons doing the same job. In El Paso several studies revealed that Mexican workers received lower wages than Anglos (see Garcia 1981: 88-96). Indeed, two wage structures existed in El Paso: one for Anglos and another for Mexicans. While I do not have data on wage differentials for Fabens at this early point in its history, I assume that a similar wage structure was in place in Fabens because it is located in El Paso County.

A third factor contributing to racial stratification in Fabens was heightened racial tensions between Mexicans and Anglos in Texas; conflict and violence were frequent and became a major tool of settling disputes.

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<sup>11</sup>Mexican Americans were more likely than Anglos to have menial, low-paying jobs. About 61 percent of Mexican American household heads were employed full-time, compared to 73 percent among Anglo household heads. Further, about 3 to 12 percent of Anglo household heads were either working part-time or not in the labor force, respectively. The figures for Mexican American household heads were 12 and 16 percent.

Anglo household heads represented about 23, 21, and 9 percent of Professional, Proprietor/Manager, and Sales Workers. The figures for Mexican Americans were 2, 6, and 8 percent, respectively. Indeed, most Mexican American household heads were working in Semi-skilled/Unskilled jobs (56%); whereas most Anglos were in professional or managerial jobs (23 and 21 percent).

<sup>12</sup>In 1905, there were twelve children in Fabens in need of an education. C. F. White and Pat O'Donnell decided to start a school. The school was opened on the Henry Elam farm. John Phelan, an elderly man in his seventies who had moved West because of his wife's health, taught in the one room school. On the night of January 6, 1906 the school and all its contents burned to the ground. There was no school in Fabens from 1906 to 1909. On December 1, 1909 a new school was completed. Fifteen children were enrolled.

In 1917, the Cobos School was completed at a cost of \$10,000. In 1925, the Cobos School became the Latin-American School, and Anglo students were transferred to the new grammar school. The Cobos School was eventually torn down in 1948, and the new Fabens High School built over it.

*The Education of Mexican Americans in Fabens*<sup>12</sup>

The effect that racial stratification had on the education of Mexican Americans in Fabens, Texas is the focus of this section. In particular, this analysis is on one aspect of such a system of structured inequality: inequality in the social consciousness. As such, the views held by parents, students, and teachers about schooling, one another, and the preferential treatment that is meted out in school were examined. The following topics are examined: (1) ideological views held by teachers, parents, and students; and (2) spatial issues pertaining to social consciousness affecting the education of Mexican Americans in Fabens.

*1. Ideological Factors Contributing to the Education of Mexican Americans.* The perceptions teachers and other school personnel have of their students influences students' performance (Cicourel and Kitsuse 1977; Grant 1984; Rosenthal and Jacobson 1968; Verdugo 1986). Data from the 1969 community survey of Fabens allowed me to examine several ideological or social consciousness issues that negatively affect the education of Mexican American students. Parents, students, and teachers were asked three questions: (1) their views about education; (2) the difficulty some groups have in school; and (3) their views about student outcomes, e.g., jobs and college. Table 2 presents data on the opinions teachers and parents had about these issues.

Table 2. Parents and Teachers' Opinions of Education	
Opinion	Percent
Teachers answering that parents were not interested in education.	56
Parents satisfied with the education of their children.	86
Parents happy about the interest of teachers with their children.	82
Parents feeling that their opinions were respected.	61
Teachers feeling that their opinions were respected.	39

Source: William V. D'Antonio and Irwin Press. 1969. Fabens Texas. Unpublished manuscript. Manuscript and all research materials are currently in the possession of Richard R. Verdugo.

When the views of parents and teachers are compared, teachers expressed views that could only have negative effects in their interactions with parents. To begin, over half of the teachers interviewed (56%) believed that parents were not interested in education, and nearly forty percent of teachers (39%) felt that parents did not respect their (teachers) opinions. Some of the beliefs expressed by teachers were ethnically-based. For example, in referring to the views Mexican American parents have about education, one teacher responded, "They see education as a necessary evil." In contrast, teachers observed that Anglo parents wanted a college education for their children and, as some teachers suggested, "they have the money for it."

Teachers' negative views must be contrasted with those held by parents. Differences were significant. Eighty-six percent of parents who were interviewed said they were satisfied with the education their children were receiving. Another 82 percent were happy with the interest teachers exhibited toward their children, and over half (61%) of parents felt that teachers respected parents' opinions. Thus, in contrast to teachers, parents expressed greater satisfaction with schools, teachers and the education their own children were receiving.

Parents and teachers were also asked about the difficulty some groups of students have in school. What is noteworthy is the use of ideology as an explanatory system, particularly among teachers. These data are displayed in Table 3. Teachers (78%) recognized that some groups of students had a difficult time in school. About 65 percent offered reasons for these difficulties that focused on culture, economics, linguistics, and family background. In fact, language was given a prominent place as a factor holding students back. The family did not escape from being blamed for their children's poor performance: "if the parents do not care that the child does not have paper, pencil..." or "supposedly they (the student's parents) learned English. But they don't speak it. They teach their children Spanish and ridicule English." An ethnically-based ideology seems to have been used in blaming Mexican Americans for their poor academic performance, while structural views, such as tracking, were never mentioned.

Table 3. Parents and Teachers Acknowledge That Some Groups Have a Hard Time Getting an Education	
TEACHERS	Percent
Some groups have a hard time getting an education (Yes)	78
Reasons some groups have a hard time getting an education: cultural, economic, linguistic, family background	65
PARENTS	
Some groups have a hard time getting an education (Yes)	42
Reasons some groups have a hard time getting an education:	
Mexican Americans are poor and have to work harder	85
Discrimination	45
Family carelessness toward children	27

Source: William V. D'Antonio and Irwin Press. 1969. Fabens Texas. Unpublished manuscript. Manuscript and all research materials are currently in the possession of Richard R. Verdugo.

Parents, in contrast, were less likely than teachers to believe that some groups had a difficult time in school (42% felt that some groups had it harder). Eighty-five percent of parents felt that Mexican American students from poor families had to work harder; and 45 percent felt Mexican American students were being discriminated against. Teacher discrimination, some parents hinted, could be seen in such school behaviors as less attention and less effort given toward educating Mexican American students. But some parents blamed families. For instance, 27 percent of parents blamed family carelessness in raising their children: "Parents don't prepare their children for school. They don't teach them English or help them with the homework and dress them properly." Finally, 44 percent of those parents interviewed felt that no group had a particularly hard time in obtaining an education.

Parental expectations not only have important effects on the education of their children, but such expectations speak volumes about stratification existing in a community. In order to grasp the role racial stratification plays



in the social consciousness, parents were asked four questions about their children: (1) what kind of work will your son (daughter) most probably do when she (he) finished his (her) education?; (2) what kind of work would he (she) like to do?; (3) what kind of work do you think your son (daughter) will be able to do when he (she) finishes his (her) education?; and (4) what may prevent him (her) from doing what you would like him (her) to do? These data are displayed in Table 4. Significant differences in responses between Mexicans and Anglos would be major confirmation of race-based stratification.

Parents' Views	Percent	
	Mexican American	Anglo
What kinds of work will your son (daughter) most probably do when he (she) finishes his (her) education?:		
<i>Professional work that requires a college education</i>	18	*
<i>Secretarial work/office work.</i>	30	*
<i>Nurse or teacher</i>	7	*
<i>Anything they like</i>	21	85
Something that will enable them to make a living	7	*
<i>Don't Know</i>	5	15
<i>No Response</i>	12	*
What kind of work do you think your son (daughter) will be able to do when he (she) finishes his (her) education?:		
<i>Professional job</i>	36	86
<i>Skilled work</i>	2	*
<i>Anything they want</i>	9	14
<i>Don't Know</i>	45	*
<i>No Response</i>	8	*

What kind of work would he (she) like to do?:		
<i>Engineer</i>	15	*
<i>Professional</i>	31	50
<i>Secretarial/Office</i>	20	*
<i>Skilled Work</i>	5	*
<i>Semi-Skilled Work</i>	2	*
<i>Other</i>	4	25
<i>Don't Know</i>	17	*
<i>No Response</i>	6	25
What may prevent him (her) from doing what you would like for his (her) to do?		
<i>Nothing</i>	30	63
<i>Financial Problems</i>	47	*
<i>Don't Know</i>	23	37

Source: William V. D'Antonio and Irwin Press. 1969. Fabens Texas. Unpublished manuscript. Manuscript and all research materials are currently in the possession of Richard R. Verdugo.

The privileged positions Anglos had in Fabens can be seen by their views about socioeconomic outcomes. Anglo parents, more than Mexican American parents, held high expectations about the socioeconomic outcomes for their children. Anglo parents believed their children could achieve anything to which they set their minds (85%), whereas only 21 percent of Mexican American parents held such a belief. Eighty-six percent of Anglo parents believed that their children would eventually attain a professional occupation, and only 36 percent of Mexican American parents felt the same. Indeed, 45 percent of Mexican American parents had no idea what their children would be able to do after high school. Privileged status leads to a particular mind set and to clear views about life chances, while disadvantage leads to ambiguity about such outcomes.

Power and status have their benefits, and inculcates an optimistic outlook, a sense that no barrier is insurmountable, and high occupational aspirations. Parents were asked what they thought their children would like to do and what might prevent their children from doing these things. Fifty percent of Anglo parents felt their children aspired to professional jobs, while only 31 percent of Mexican Americans responded similarly. When asked

what may prevent their children from realizing their aspirations, 63 percent of Anglo parents said “nothing,” while 30 percent of Mexican American parents offered the same response. Nearly half of Mexican American parents felt, on the other hand, that financial problems would hinder their offspring from realizing their occupational aspirations. Privilege shapes ones views about life and its outcomes.

Parents and teachers held different views about students in general. The optimism Anglo parents had about their children, and the pessimism expressed by Mexican American parents, were also reflected by the teachers. Teachers in Fabens not only held low expectations about their students’ eventual outcomes, but they also exhibited deeply engrained gender stereotypes. When asked, “Where do you think most of the male students will eventually wind up?,” 82 percent believed that students would work in factories, in semi-skilled or skilled jobs; some suggested clerical jobs. Only 10 percent even mentioned—as a last choice—that perhaps a few would attain professional jobs or attend college.

Teachers stereotyped girls. Sixty-one percent believed that female students would get married. Some specified, “and they will raise a large family.” Fourteen percent felt that girls would end up in factories or in clerical occupations. Only one teacher suggested that perhaps a few female students would become professionals. One teacher, commenting on both questions, said that progress could be seen in the jobs students pursued, “Before, the boys used to work on farms. Now very few do. Most work at factories and clerical jobs.” About girls, the teacher commented: “Before, they got married or worked as maids, now they are working in factories and in offices.”

As an anchor for these findings and as further evidence about the social consciousness permeating the community, students were asked about their own aspirations. Data are presented in Table 5. When asked, “What kind of work would your parents like you to do when you finish high school,” 59 percent of Anglo students and only 29 percent of Mexican American students responded, “go to college and study for a profession.” Fifteen percent of Mexican American students also responded “clerical or sales work,” whereas Anglo students simply did not entertain such an occupational outcome. Mexican-American students clearly had lower occupational aspirations than their Anglo counterparts.

Aspirations	Percent	
	Mexican American	Anglo
What kind of work would your parents like for you to do when you finish high school?		
<i>What satisfied me</i>	23	19
<i>Go to college and study for a profession</i>	29	59
<i>Clerical or sales work</i>	15	*
<i>Other, no response</i>	33	22
What kind of work would you like to do when you finish high school?		
<i>Go to college</i>	37	45
<i>Vocational school</i>	11	23
<i>Clerical or sales work</i>	6	4
<i>Other, no response</i>	25	14
<i>Not decided</i>	11	14
What may prevent you from doing what you would like to do when you finish high school?		
<i>Money</i>	38	13
<i>Marriage</i>	8	9
<i>Grades</i>	8	31
<i>Draft</i>	8	4
<i>Nothing</i>	4	27
<i>Other, no response</i>	34	16

Source: William V. D'Antonio and Irwin Press. 1969. Fabens Texas. Unpublished manuscript. Manuscript and all research materials are currently in the possession of Richard R. Verdugo.

Moreover, Anglo students, more than Mexican American students, seem to have a sharper sense about their futures after high school. Forty-five percent of Anglo students and 37 percent of Mexican American students said, "go to college." An additional 23 percent of Anglo students and only 11 percent of Mexican American students felt they would go to vocational school and learn a trade. Status in the social hierarchy and a sense of control over one's destiny, appear to be passed from one generation to the next, and is one possible foundation for the perpetuation of racial stratification.

2. *Spatial Factors: The Social Consciousness and the Education of Mexican Americans*<sup>13</sup>. There were several kinds of "spatial" or social consciousness questions asked of parents, students, and teachers: issues about communication, parental involvement in the education of their children, how race/class differences were played out in the school, and questions pertaining to social mobility. To a great extent these are important issues because they indicate the extent to which Mexican Americans and Anglos were separated in the social consciousness (Ossowski 1963). "Them and Us" notions as well as how differently they view these issues were crucial and were reflected in the considerable separation in the social consciousness between the two groups.

When asked which group of parents with whom they communicate best, the responses by teachers reflected social consciousness separation based on language and race. Some teachers indicated that they get on well with "any parent who can speak English." Others suggested that they communicate best with parents who showed an interest in the education of their children. Some teachers (30%) felt they communicated well with the

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<sup>13</sup>Fabens is near El Paso, Texas. Given the closeness of the communities, it is reasonable to postulate that both may have had similar educational experiences. In his excellent study of El Paso, Mario T. Garcia (1981) points out four traits of schools in El Paso that influenced the education of Mexican Americans. First, schools were segregated. Second, the content of the curriculum for Mexicans stressed Americanization (with a heavy emphasis on English language acquisition) and vocational education. Third, the family was blamed for the low educational attainments of Mexican American children. And fourth:

Important mainly as an unskilled labor force, Mexican in El Paso and throughout the Southwest, received only a minimal education through Mexican schools located in the barrios. Education along the border, as elsewhere, served the specific economic and intellectual needs of the larger community. In El Paso the type of training provided Mexicans by racially segregated public schools complemented the labor requirements of industries and businesses for manual workers from the Mexican population. The schools also functioned as a means of social control through their attempts to Americanize the Mexicans in order to make them legal and disciplined future

parents of all their students, and they also indicated that they knew most parents of their students because they visited their students' homes.

Parental involvement is an important contributor to student success. It is important for at least two reasons. First, it sends a message to one's children that school is important and it is important that they try hard and do well in school. Second, involvement makes advocacy for one's child easier. Parents in Fabens were asked how they viewed their participation in their child's school, and what they would like to see as their role as parents<sup>14</sup>. Forty-eight percent of parents responding felt they and teachers should be interested in their children's problems. Some parents had no idea whatsoever what their participation in school should be, and others said there was nothing they could do. In fact, among this latter group, a typical statement was, "parents just have unhappy experiences with the school." A majority of parents (61 percent), however, felt their opinions were respected by school personnel. These figures must be contrasted with the 39 percent of teachers who felt that their own opinions were respected by parents. Teachers who felt that their opinions were not respected by parents (61%) blamed students: "students destroy teachers' opinions of parents." In general there was no consensus among parents about their participation, and some felt that their participation was not appreciated. Thus, one aspect of the spatial dimension of social consciousness can be seen by this lack of understanding about roles and responsibilities regarding an important factor in student academic success.

Ethnic and social class differences between teachers and students also contribute to separation in the social consciousness between the two groups. Most students are of Mexican ancestry and come from working-class or poor families. Students find themselves being taught by Anglo teachers (only 3 of the 39 teachers in Fabens were of Mexican ancestry) whose social class origins are considerably different from their own. In contrast, Anglo students are from predominantly middle-class origins, with values and beliefs closely aligned with those of their teachers. Parents and teachers were both asked about ethnic and class disparities in order to ascertain their importance in school. About one-quarter of teachers (26%) felt that if more Mexican-American teachers were hired, it would improve relations between parents and teachers. Some teachers also felt that such a situation would improve communication between students and teachers. As one teacher stated, "Maybe it will help to counteract the idea that the school is a purely

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<sup>14</sup>It must be remembered that a majority of parents are Mexican American. The opinions expressed were obtained from Mexican parents in roughly the proportion to their numbers in Fabens.

Anglo institution.” Another teacher felt that it was absolutely urgent to hire more Mexican-American teachers: “Is that not rather obvious?” About 33 percent of teachers felt that in hiring a teacher, competency should be the yardstick, “race does not make any difference,” one teacher responded. Two teachers pointed out that Mexican-American teachers were not as interested in Mexican-American students as were some Anglo teachers<sup>15</sup>. Ethnicity and class interacted to separate groups in the social consciousness, not only between parents and teachers but, apparently, among teachers themselves.

I continued with the analysis of group differences by focusing on whether parents felt the existing school faculty was appropriate for the community. About 50 percent of parents felt that, indeed, the current faculty was appropriate; nineteen percent did not think so, and the remainder said they did not know. When probed for the reasons behind their views, those who thought teachers were appropriate replied that it was because the current cadre of teachers knew the community, worked hard, and were “nice with the people.” The 19 percent who indicated that more Mexican-American teachers should be hired felt that it would improve communication, reduce discrimination, and help teachers to better understand the Mexican-American population.

Students were also asked their views about parental involvement. Students were asked, “Do you think that parents’ participation in school affairs is necessary, unnecessary, desirable but not necessary or neither desirable nor necessary?” Eighty-six percent of Mexican-American students and 59 percent of Anglo students said it was necessary. As to the actual form parental involvement should take in school, 19 percent of the Anglos and 25 percent of the Mexican-American students felt that parents should give their opinions about teachers, materials taught, and the administration of the school. Other students (17 percent Anglos and 14 percent Mexican-Americans) felt that parents’ role should be expressed in an interest in students’ problems. Sixty-one percent agreed that parent-teacher relationships were valuable. When they were asked to be more specific, students explained that it would

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<sup>15</sup>Overt discrimination was not characteristic in the Faben’s school system in 1969. However, there was a subtle kind of discrimination, as reflected in the social behaviors and attitudes of teachers and non-Mexican-American students. To begin with, Mexican American and Anglo students seldomly mixed: they held separate proms, for example. Second, one teacher expressed the following view, which seemed to capture the pervasive belief among teachers:

The Mexican Americans are just not interested. They don’t want to become real Americans. Their kids just don’t care about school. They don’t respond to us. We can’t get through to them. They just wind up as factory workers. What can we do?

help teachers better know the backgrounds of their students, and that teachers would then be better prepared to help them resolve their (students') problems. Some student responses were: "Teachers will be able to help students with things they do not understand;" "Get an idea of home background." Another student said, "The teacher will understand the students and the parents will understand the teachers' positions."

At first, these results seemed troubling because of the greater proportion of Mexican-American students than Anglo students indicating that parental involvement was important. However, upon further reflection it occurred to me that one possible explanation may be that such differences are the result of privilege and disadvantage. Coming from privileged backgrounds and in an environment of racial stratification where such privilege is reinforced on a daily basis, Anglo students may have come to the realization that there are no barriers to their achievement and therefore their parents' involvement is not crucial. In contrast, as disadvantaged students, Mexican-American students feel they need all the assistance they can muster for their school achievement. These results illustrate an area that needs further research.

## CONCLUSION

Social structure is the regular and patterned forms of social behavior and social organization. Social structure has many important functions, but one of its most prominent functions is to maintain a system of structured inequality. The basis of such structured inequality can be social class, gender, income, race, or any combination of these factors.

Uncovering what factors undergird a system of structured inequality is important to be sure. But it is especially crucial to understand how such a system evolved and imprinted itself onto a social system. The purpose of this paper has been to document the emergence of a system of structured inequality based on race (racial stratification) and to assess its impact on one important social institution: the educational system. This analysis focused on one community: Fabens, Texas. The analysis was historical, using historical materials and data from a complete community survey conducted in 1969 by a research team from Notre Dame University.

By racial stratification I mean a system where an ethnic-racial group occupies the lower stratum in social life, where social institutions are organized to maintain these positions, and where the "social consciousness" is such that it not only justifies such a hierarchy, but tends to separate groups. This analysis tends to corroborate the idea that racial stratification has an effect on the education of Mexican-Americans in the community. That



effect leads to lesser education for Mexican-Americans and, through subtle messages, prepares them for inferior jobs and socioeconomic statuses.

The educational system as it existed in Fabens in 1969, driven as it was by a system of racial stratification, failed to provide an education to Mexican-Americans, and the ideology created a social consciousness in the community that not only justified the poor education Mexican-Americans were receiving, but it also worked to separate the groups and create conflict rather than community. Not only did the educational system, through its agents, show far more concern about the academic deficiencies of Mexican-Americans—their lack of English speaking skills, their negative views about schooling, and negative views about teachers and the school process in general—but there were wide gulfs in the views parents, teachers, and students had about one another, schooling, and educational outcomes. For example, Anglos had high educational and occupational expectations for themselves and their children. In contrast, Mexican-Americans did not. The educational system appeared to be one part of the larger social structure created and maintained to uphold a rigid caste-like social system.

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