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Issue Brief

Discrimination Based on Socio-Economic Status

Key Words

Race, Education, Income, Class, Poverty, Achievement

Description

This Issue Brief outlines the discrimination that occurs in this country based on the socio-economic-status of an individual. This is an issue that in some cases transcends racial barriers.

Key Points

- Lower class minorities, as well as lower class whites, have difficulty climbing the economic ladder because of their economic status.
- Higher education is expensive, which results in the lower-class having difficulty obtaining it
- Upper-class students have displayed better performance in the classroom
- Lower-class communities still struggle to receive enough governmental aid

Issue Brief

In the United States, many opportunities are given based on one's economic status. In most cases, economic status is obtained with greater ease the higher one's education level is. These two truths are very related in the fact that many educational opportunities are provided based on one's economic background, considering that the best available educations are the most expensive. This leads to the upper-class receiving the best educations more so than not, as lower-income communities often struggle with educational attainment. This has lead America into a reoccurring pattern where the rich stay rich and the poor struggle to end generational poverty.

Many minorities have struggled in this American system of wealth and education because of their family history of poverty. Since slavery African Americans have been fighting to increase their presence in the United States politically, as well as economically, through educational achievement and the utilization of mechanisms that are geared toward awarding more opportunities for minorities. One of these mechanisms that minorities are most familiar with is Affirmative Action. It is this same mechanism that has raised a lot of conflict with lower class whites, who believe that Affirmative Action is an additional barrier to their own struggle for educational and economic attainment in a country that tends to have little sympathy for lower-class whites.

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"WE DON'T LIKE LABELS HERE, MR PHELPS —
BESIDES, WE'RE NOT A FAILING SCHOOL, WE'RE
A FAILING ACADEMY...."

1

Though many connect lower-class struggles with the Black and Hispanic community, a study has shown that lower class whites “confront many of the same occupational barriers that face poor blacks”. This stems from the same struggles with

¹ Cartoonstock.com

low educational achievement that lower class whites also experience. The fact that even lower class whites struggle to attain high levels of education only highlights “the income conditioned nature of access to better schools and jobs for the poor [that] would seem to offer marked advantages over the continued emphasis on racial distinctions”



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2

Studies have also shown that student’s social class is related to school performance.³ It has been reported that higher status students have performed better academically, shown better behavior and displayed less conflict with teachers. All the blame cannot be put on the lower-class students, being that studies have reported that higher income students have been shown to be placed closer to the instructor in seating arrangements, instructors have given less challenging curriculums to lower status

² Cartoonstock.com

³ Amato, J. “Social Discrimination in the Schooling Process: Myth and Reality”

students.⁴ The fact that these teachers are giving lower-income students less challenging curriculums, whether it is because more rigorous curriculums are too challenging or not, is only prohibiting these students from being equipped to compete with the best students in the country who are fighting against them for admission into the nation's best colleges. This is only the beginning of the struggle for many of these low-income students, considering that schools are giving away less financial aid due to the economy.

The struggle for education is exacerbated by the high turnover rates of teachers who teach in these lower-class communities, as well as the lack of adequate facilities for these students to utilize throughout their years in school. Many of these schools that these low-income students attend do not have extracurricular programming available. These lower-class students need these enriching activities to divert them from the distractions of their communities.

In addition to the struggles for education which correlate with the struggle that lower-income individuals face with occupational opportunities, another issue that this community has struggled with is aid from the government. There has been less effort devoted to the development of alternate forms of aid to assist the lower class with certain necessities, ranging from free healthcare to welfare. "This type of aid can be viewed as a form of price discrimination, with some groups, by virtue of their lower incomes, paying lower prices for certain commodities than other groups".⁵

⁴ Amato, J. "Social Discrimination in the Schooling Process: Myth and Reality"

⁵ Le Grand, J. "Public Price Discrimination and Aid to Low Income Groups"

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"It's a letter from the government explaining their need for keeping
a lid on social security -- and a sample of appetite suppressants." 6

This lower-class community still fights to this day for improvements in their communities' schools for the good of their children, as well as for the increased investment by the government in aid to these low-income families. It is through these subsidies that this community can even the playing field with the middle and upper-class communities who they hope to finally be able to compete with for opportunities that will lead to a better quality of life.

General References

Amato, J. "Social Discrimination in the Schooling Process: Myth and Reality", *The Urban Review*, Vol. 12, No. 3, (1980): 121-125.

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Schiller, B. "Class Discrimination vs. Racial Discrimination", *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, Vol. 53, No. 3. (1971): 263-69. Web. 18 March, 2010

Websites

This site discusses relevant concerns with Affirmative Action:

<http://www.understandingprejudice.org/>

This site discusses the concerns on how to improve this nation's education system:

<http://www.openeducation.net/>

This site covers the issues of government spending on aid:

<http://www.realclearpolitics.com/>

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