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# The American Dream: Equality in Education

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The American Dream: Equality in Education

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Author's Note

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## Latinos and the American Dream

### **Abstract**

The “American Dream” of acquiring a college education is not a realistic goal for every citizen in the United States. Today a college education is becoming a necessity and Latino citizens are not provided with the same opportunities that Caucasian students are. This study looks at the college education gap among Latina/os and compares the college graduation rates between Latinos and Caucasians. Using peer review sources, the study assesses the impact of this education gap on job opportunities, wages and overall earning potential and quality of life among Latina/os and Caucasians. Finally, this work aims to raise awareness among uninformed Americans of the inequality still occurring in the United States’ as a result of the education gap that exist between Latina/os and Caucasians.

### **Argument**

Being not only a current college student, but also being the first person in my family to attend college was a large mile stone in my life. Education has become a very essential tool in one's life if you live in America. Today, a college degree is just as useful as a high school diploma 50 years ago. One may ask what has changed in America in those 50 years. Well, technology, population, and medical advancements have played a major role in the importance of a college degree. Because education is so important and America stresses the equality they provide everyone in education, this equality needs to be instilled in every educational institute in order for the country to progress.

The rate of Latinos in America graduating with a college degree has increased from 19 percent to 23 percent. Although this is great progress, a study written by Meredith Kolodner who is a writer for the Hechinger Report and the New York Times, found that the rate for Caucasians graduating with a degree has increased as well. However, the rate for Caucasians has increased at a higher rate than Latinos. One aspect that has created this division throughout colleges and universities in the United States is not only the lack of funding, but also the rise in tuition nationwide. According to Kolodners research, funding at the college level per student has declined 21% since the year 2008, and tuition has risen on average 28% since 2008 as well (Kolodner, 16). With tuition rates still climbing and the sea of debt students are swimming in becoming more deep, this can make it harder for young adults to not only finish college with a degree, but attend college in the first place. The lack of funding and rise in tuition has directly affected the Latino community throughout the United States making it even harder for Latinos to not fall under these statistics.

One major problem with the race gap between Caucasians and Latinos throughout America is the poverty rate and who falls under the poverty line. According to the United States Census Bureau, in the year 2011 on average 26.3% of Latinos fell under the nations poverty line whereas only 11.6% of Caucasians fell under. From that study alone, Latinos more than double the average of Caucasians that are impoverished (Macartney, 2013). This can be directly linked to the larger amount of white Americans being able to attend college at a larger rate than that of Latinos. Being largely under the poverty line puts Latinos in this never ending cycle as well. Not making enough money links to not being able to afford to go to college, which then leads to not being able to get a high paying job to support themselves or family, which places them and their family to continue to be in poverty. Not being able to equally attend college at the rate of Caucasians throughout the United States will only continue this cycle until equality is instilled.

The cost of Tuition for universities has increased at an exponential rate. In fact, according to the United States College Board, the cost of tuition has increased by 945% since the 1980's. This increase has made it so that in some universities, students are graduating with one quarter of a million dollars in student debt or more. Why has the cost of attending college increased at such a high rate in just over 20 years? Economically, the colleges and universities need this increase in order to satisfy their supply and demand needs. The cost of funding, technology, and the better education we receive now needs the large cost of tuition in order to properly run their institution. However, that is the cost of doing business, this large amount of money needed just to get an education is leaving the Latino community behind. Because of the rise in tuition, according to a study conducted by Christina Baker who has a Ph.D. in Multicultural Studies, found that in the year 2006, 30% of Caucasians over the age of 25 held a bachelor degree, whereas only 12% of Latinos over the age of 25 held a bachelor degree (Baker, 2012). This statistic can also be found

from the National Center for Educational Statistics. This being said, that means that with the American population holding a bachelor degree, Caucasians more than double that of Latinos, which further expresses the cycle of poverty that seems to be nearly impossible in this day and age to break out of.

Another issue that is discouraging for the Latino community, especially for women, is the wage gap we see as compared to White men in high paying jobs. Statistically throughout the United States, according to Lilly Ledbetter, who is a major civil rights activist and recognized my president Barack Obama, found that Latina women get paid on average 54 cents to the white man's dollar in high paying jobs (Ledbetter, 2009). Let's put that into perspective. If a white male is working at an accounting firm and making \$2,000.00 per week, that means that a Latina woman working the same job is statistically making only making \$1,080.00 for that same week doing the same job. This directly affects the Latino community for the reason that it is discouraging. To want to pursue an education only to make 54 cents to a white man's dollar doing the same work with the same credentials only sets the tone that putting in the hard work is not worth doing so. Even though having a degree increases your chances at making more money, working hard to earn that degree only to not be treated equally due to not only your ethnicity, but also your race makes the drive to further yourself in education smaller.

This wage gap doesn't only affect women however. For a country that is based on freedom and equality, the amount of inequality that occurs between race and gender is very high even for 2016. In fact, according to the same study, Latino men only make on average 67.2 cents to the white man's dollar for high paying jobs. These statistics not only discourage the Latino people of the United States to attend college, but is also makes it even harder for them to break out above the poverty line. These numbers just prove that even with getting an education to not

be a statistic for your entire race, you still will not be equal to the Caucasians throughout the United States. Knowing that you will make significantly less money than the Caucasians in America only furthers the thought that going to college will not matter.

Another factor that affects Latinos and their success in education is their self-identity. In an article written by Lindsey Wilkinson, who works in the department of Sociology at Portland State University, discussed the effect of how Latinos identify with their ethnicity and how this affects their education. This article discusses the contrast between home life and school life and how they can be culturally polar opposites. Growing up in a home where you speak Spanish, follow Spanish traditions, and consider your-self a Latino is very different than how the education system is in America. Latino students can become very lost and confused with their self-identity because of the “American” ideal of what is normal for our culture. You are expected to act American based on what this country has instilled for expectations. Not being able to express your Latino heritage in your education from a younger age than the young adults attending college can determine how far you take your education (Wilkinson, 2010). The expectation placed for Latino students can have a direct effect on their educational experience and whether or not they want to go further. Not being able to find a place where you feel welcome with your identity, culture, and self can make it so you don’t want to attend college which happens to often throughout America. This article also discusses the fact that there are many schools throughout the United States in low income areas that are predominantly populated by Latino students, and in these schools pushing for academic success is not a main priority (Wilkinson, 2010).

To continue the low income v Latino populated schools, a study from Janie Boschma, who is a writer for the Atlantic and graduated from the University of Wisconsin, found that in

half of the 100 largest cities in America, African Americans and Latinos attend schools where 75% of the students are below the poverty line (Boschma, 2016). Not being able to attend a good education prior to attending college only furthers the expectation that you will not be successful due to your ethnicity. Even though segregation was abolished in the 1900's, the socioeconomic segregation still exists and is only increasing due to the inability to provide a better and equal opportunity to the Latino community in education throughout the United States.

Another part of the pre-college experience that correlates to the racial gap we see today between Latinos and Caucasians, is the high school dropout rate we see nation-wide. In fact, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, as of 2013 the dropout rate for Caucasians nation-wide in high schools is only 5% whereas for Latinos it was as high as 12% (NCES, 2013). This 12% is a major decrease from 1990 where the dropout rate for Latinos was as high as 32%. Even though the Latino community has made progress since the year 1990, the dropout rate for Latinos is still more than twice the rate for Caucasians. Having the dropout rate be significantly higher for Latinos than Caucasians makes it so that Caucasians have an even higher chance of getting accepted or even applying to colleges. More white citizens having the opportunity to go to college just from finishing high school makes the gap between races exist which provides Caucasians a better opportunity for education than Latinos.

An article I found from the United States News official site, found some interesting statistics that many people in America don't focus on or have any knowledge about. In fact, one thing that needs to be addressed in order to help close the gap between Latinos and Caucasians is looking at not only the rate of being accepted into college, but actually graduating and obtaining a degree. This study from the University of Central Arkansas found that in 2003 the graduation rate between Caucasians and Latinos wasn't that large. The rate of Caucasians graduating with a



degree was at 40% where-as all under-represented minorities were at 38% (Camera, 2015. P.2.). Fast forward this to the year 2013 and that gap has significantly increased. By the year 2013 the percentage of Caucasians graduating was at 46% leaving all under-represented minorities down to only 25% (Camera, 2015. P.2.). The reason that looking at these numbers when it comes to equality in education is so important is because it is what the leaders of this country fail to include to the American public. Sure maybe the acceptance rate gap going into college is narrowing, however the gap between races when it comes to graduating with a degree is growing larger between each other.

Even though the odds seem to be against Latinos when it comes to education, pay rate, and gender inequality, there has been much progress made just in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The high school drop-out rate has significantly decreased which has caused the enrollment of Latinos in Universities to increase. One factor that has made this a reality is according to an article from the Pew Research Center by Jens Krogstad, “Hispanics cited education as a top issue in 2014” (Krogstad, 2015. P. 1.). According to this research study, the issue of education and equality in education, Hispanics felt was more important than socioeconomics and health care (Krogstad, 2015). Having the Latino community reach out and state that they feel that education is a very important factor in their life shows that they are not only fighting for equal treatment in education, but also that our country is progressing to ensure that everyone is treated equally.

According to Krogstad, another important statistic to notice is that Latinos are more likely to graduate from college with little to no debt (Krogstad, 2015). Comparing student debt between Caucasians and Latinos, only 22% of Latino households have student debt throughout the country whereas the rate for Caucasians to have student debt is as high as 42% (Krogstad, 2015). This could also be because there are more Caucasians that attend college rather than

Latinos, however this sets up the Latino students to have a head start when they do graduate from college.

### **Solution**

Based on my research from my articles and statistics, Latinos have made progress but still lag behind Caucasians when it comes to education, high paying jobs, and gender equality. Although it is clear that there are flaws in the education system throughout the United States, this issue is not well known. There is not one solution to solve the inequality in education. It would be ideal for America to ensure that no matter what race you are you have an equal opportunity to get an education, a good job, and not be a part of a large community that is more in poverty than others. The only way to get the system to change and to create a more equal society is to spread awareness that even in 2016 there is still prejudice. Knowing that based on your race you can either have a better chance at a well life or a higher chance of being in poverty can help the system. There still needs to be further research, however the knowledge of the inequalities that still occur today need to be aware to the American people in order to make a change.

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