

Spatial Traditions of Knowledge and Education – Ethnic Groups in the United States Reconsidered

Werner Gamerith (Geography), University of Passau (Germany)

Nowhere in American society is the race/ethnicity-gap more visible than in the field of education. In this regard public schooling fulfilled the role ascribed to it only poorly if at all: to work as the great harmonizer and equalizer for American society and to guarantee the same opportunities to any individual. Yet the traditions of public education and its outcomes tell completely different stories of discrimination, oppression, and inequality. Added to these factors is a strong connotation of spatiality making it essential for one's educational career where it starts. Both inner-city and rural-peripheral areas suffer from a lot of disadvantages in this respect.

Contrary to some recent media reports claiming an improvement of the ethnic bridge in American education in the wake of "Obamania", the paper suggests otherwise: Based on statistical evidence it claims that different ethnic traditions of education, based on cultural dispositions, are still at work. Thus racial and ethnic cleavages continue to exist within the United States, being prominently reflected in the fields of schooling and education.